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# HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

March, 1984



## A Friend in Need

by Hy Conrad  
9 Stories!



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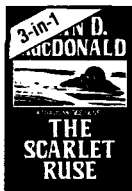
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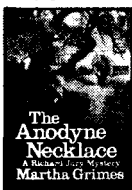
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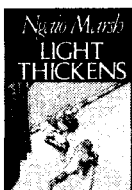
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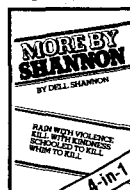
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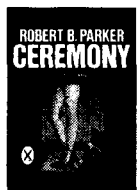
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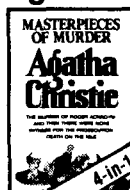
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**I**n the January issue we brought you the nominees for the Shamus Awards given by the Private Eye Writers of America for Best Hardcover Novel, Best Paperback Novel, and Best Short Story of 1982 featuring private eyes. And this time around, we can tell you who won. We're pleased to say that the Short Story prize was awarded to John Lutz for one of his Nudger stories, "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You" (AHMM, November, 1982).

The Best Hardcover Novel award was won by Lawrence Sanders for *Eight Million Ways To Die* (Arbor House), and the Best Paperback Novel award went to William Campbell Gault for *The Cana Diversion* (Raven House).

The awards were presented at Bouchercon XIV, which took place in October in New York. As in the past, Bouchercon was a three-day series of talks, panel discussions, and entertainments (for the latter, see Frames of Reference in this issue). We particularly enjoyed the whole thing for the chance it gave us to meet some of AHMM's widely-scattered authors for the first time—Ingram Meyer, Percy

Parker, Rob Kantner—and to get to see others.

And now, in this issue . . . a varied collection, we think, of crimes solved by policemen, amateur investigators, a new private eye, and a cat. Jessica Callow is back with a poignant romance set in World War II England, and so is Ron Butler, with a new episode in the lives of Sam Brent and Inspector Ueki. Stephen Wasylyk—for the first time in nearly three years—looks in on the doings of police lieutenant Hoke Beckett, and the cat—well, we'll just refer you to Hugh Cave's "The Lady Wore Black."

The new private eye mentioned above, by the way, is Stew Cavanaugh, hero of our cover story, "A Friend in Need," by Hy Conrad. But although this is Cavanaugh's first appearance in print, he has another existence on film in a MysteryDisc, "an interactive videodisc movie and game" created by Mr. Conrad and called "Many Roads to Murder." "A Friend in Need" is one version of one of the sixteen games therein, all starring Stew Cavanaugh, and we are delighted to have the detective captured

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on paper for the sake of those of us who aren't yet possessed of laser videodisc capabilities.

In addition to the above (and other stories), Ron Goulart, who last month wrote about the private eyes on radio, takes us this time on a nostalgic trip through the years when Dick Tracy and many of his crime-solving colleagues hit the funnies; K. J.

Franks unravels the October Mysterious Photograph with, as it happens, our second giant story in as many months (entirely coincidentally, we hasten to say—and very entertainingly); and Mary Cannon takes us on a journey to Australia in *Booked & Printed*. All items we hope you'll enjoy as much as we have.

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# A FRIEND IN NEED



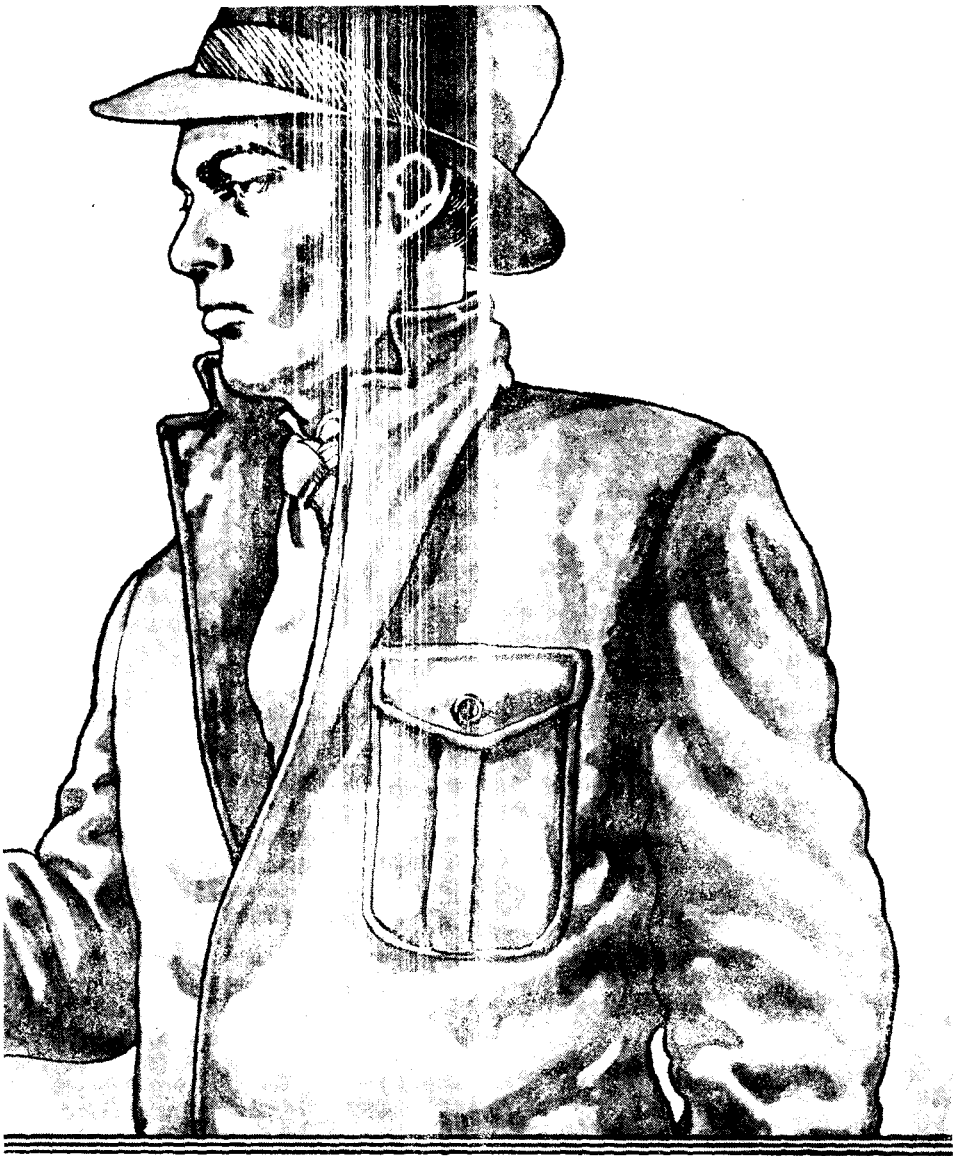
by Hy Conrad

“**T**hat’s it, no more divorces.” I made this announcement the morning after a candid photography session at the Biltmore, the result of it being two blurry pictures of the wrong

“Mr. and Mrs. Smith” sitting up in bed and looking more than a little angry.

I threw my green herringbone onto the coat tree and turned in time to see Max wiping back a strand of her per-





manent wave. "Morning, boss. Trouble with the Hamilton case?" Max was seated at her desk, a ledger open in her hands. The autumn sunlight streaming from the double window behind her made me think of a

chubby St. Peter armed with a frizzy halo and an accounting of my sins. "By the way, there's a Granny in there to see you."

"Don't you listen? I said no more . . ."

"Tall, blond, lots of swank.

He says you know the name."

I rent two frosted doors. The outer says "Stew Cavanaugh, Private Investigator." The inner says only "Private" and opens to a second room with a second desk in front of a second double window. A lean, well-dressed man was chuckling at a fourteen-year-old group shot framed on one of the walls. I don't know why I didn't recognize the name, except that my life seems to be divided into chapters and the one labeled "Class of '27" had never before invaded the one labeled on my frosted glass.

If there was anyone who personified the privilege and promise of youth, it was Granville Lowe II. Granny Number One had been a meatpacking giant with slaughterhouses and tanning factories dotting Manhattan's midtown and belching into its East River. Granny Number Two was an orphan when we met as freshmen and a strange friendship between guttersnipe and millionaire thrived during our four years. I'm a fish out of water at reunions so it was only natural to lose touch, but one look that morning brought back all the warmth and envy. Eleven years and a Depression had done little to dull his shine.

"I didn't know you had a picture of Freshman Day races."

"Granny, you son of a gun,

what are you doing here?" I was energetically pumping his arm and promising to send him a print as soon as possible and we might as well have been back in the dorm with me running down to fetch him a honeybun and a chocolate frost.

"I take it you two know each other." Max was standing in the doorway, curiosity at high tide. "Can I get you coffee?"

"No, thanks," Granny said as he threw a right. We were exchanging the little jabs that men substitute for hugs. "You'll have to excuse Stew and me. We haven't seen each other since the Yard."

"Prison?"

"Harvard."

Max nodded playfully and closed the door. Granny laughed. He had just run into Max's second best attribute. "I like her, Stew."

"You should see her when I need information. None better."

Sitting in my office naturally led to "how was I doing," which naturally led to my usual excuse of the Depression and how I have a gift for puzzles—not a lot of charm or even instinct, but a gift for puzzles nonetheless, and it helps me make a living. Not wanting to push envy, I didn't ask about him.

We were well into the litany of "what's so-and-so doing now?" when Gran let a momentary

pause grow. He looked down at the manicured hands in his lap, then used them to reach inside the Sulka & Co. blazer and pull a tattered snapshot from his inside pocket. The subject was a girl probably still in her teens with light hair and a self-conscious smile. A picture hat obscured much of what appeared to be a very attractive face.

"My sister, Tracey. You met her once. She's twenty now. I'm her guardian, until next year." The phrases came out one at a time and with difficulty. "She lives with me. In the Park Avenue place. She's missing, Stew. I didn't know who else . . . Can you find her?"

You'd have to know me better than I know myself to understand my reaction. A kid from Hell's Kitchen who works his way through Harvard has a lot of dissatisfaction stored up, all aimed at himself. He works twice as hard for half the results and instead of resenting the guys who have it easy, he counts himself lucky if they come to him one day asking for help.

Gran told the story and I took notes, throwing in questions along the way just to show my grasp of things.

On Friday Tracey told him she wanted to go slumming. "Did she do this often?" Not that he knew. She asked Gran to take her to the Caribe, an

out-of-the-way nightspot in Harlem catering to a mixed crowd. "Had she ever mentioned this place before?" Not to him. They left the penthouse at nine, drove around trying to find it, and got there about a quarter to ten. "Did they meet anyone there they knew?" No. "Did Tracey talk to anyone?"

Gran thought as he took a cigarette from a monogrammed case and tapped it against the desk. "There was a fortune teller. She was a singer, but afterwards came around to the tables. She read my palm. Prosperity—as if she couldn't tell." He pulled out a monogrammed cigarette lighter and lit up. "I went to the men's lounge, what there was of it. When I came back, the fortune teller had finished with Trace and moved on. I guess she was the only one Trace talked to. A couple of minutes later my sister started this argument."

"What about?"

"What else? Money. I try to keep her on a small allowance. She can be pretty wild. Anyway, she wanted fifty bucks. I said no. She kept insisting, raising her voice. People started looking. I told her not to make a scene, and of course that's exactly what she did, just for spite. When I still said no after all this, she just got up and walked out. By now the whole nightclub was clapping and

laughing. Fairly embarrassing."

"At what time did she walk out?"

"About ten thirty. I should have followed her, but I can be stubborn, too." Gran moistened his upper lip. "I sat there for maybe another half hour, then drove out to Long Island. I'd planned a weekend at Bill Donovan's, you remember Donovan, and I wasn't going to let her ruin it." He moistened his lip again. "I came back into town Monday morning, but she wasn't home. The last time the doorman saw her was when we left together Friday. I talked to her friends but . . ."

"What did the cops say to all this?" I watched him watching the hands in his lap for about ten seconds before I shouted, "Good heavens, Gran, this is Tuesday." Another five seconds of silence filled the room before I jumped to the only logical conclusion. "All right. Why can't you go to the cops?"

"It's Tracey," he muttered. He tried to raise his eyes to meet mine, but he couldn't. Then slowly, painfully, came the admission. "God help her, Stew. She's a dope fiend."

I'd braced myself not to be surprised and still my mouth fell open. I remembered a little girl getting off the train in Boston, more excited and proud about her brother's graduation

than any two parents combined. I remembered brother and sister pedaling the swan boats and how her laughter sang through the public gardens and made me happy just to hear it.

"I should have been able to see it in time." His eyes were still down. "The degenerate friends, the demands for money, the mood swings. I don't . . . Once she inherits and can live on her own, I don't see how anyone's going to stop her."

I asked about Tracey's friends. Gran's even features contorted as he mentioned Eric Nolan. Eric and Gran had met at the Harvard Club three years before. He was a little arty but from a good family and only a few years older than Tracey. At first Gran felt comfortable around him and wasn't disappointed when he and Tracey began spending time together.

"Then a little over a year ago he started having run-ins with the family. He quit Nolan, Roper and Robbins, his father's firm, and just started drifting, doing nothing—even living off his capital." Gran saw the smirk I was trying to hide. "We come from different worlds, Stew."

"It's tough having to live off your capital."

"Anyway, he continued to see Trace. They'd spend evenings at his house in Greenwich Village. I don't know when he first



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started taking the stuff, but it was maybe four months ago I noticed the symptoms in Trace.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Hell, Stew, she could have started long before. I’m pretty dense when it comes to noticing things.”

“Does he still go to the Harvard Club?”

Gran smiled. “It’s the one place he can run up a tab and make his dad pay. The old man can’t let a Nolan lose face. Do you want to meet him, Stew? Let me take you to dinner there. You’re taking the case, aren’t you?”

Maybe it’s an inbred ability or maybe a developed skill, but the golden people can always bend you to their will and make you feel privileged to boot. I agreed to a low-key job and said I’d meet him at the Harvard Club at eight. I took his snapshot and looked at it again. “I don’t know how much help this is going to be. You’ve got to have a better picture of your own sister.”

Gran said he wasn’t sure but he’d check around and try to find one. I asked what she’d been wearing and got an embarrassed shrug followed by “either a brown dress or a blue one.” I couldn’t help thinking that if he’d paid a little more attention to her in the first place, none of this might have happened.

It doesn’t take much to get me going, just a chance to impress a friend and maybe show myself I can still perform a useful function. I saw Gran out and told Max to call off the Hamilton case. I figured my first stop should be the Caribe, but halfway to the 72nd Street subway I turned in my tracks and did a little cursing. What was I going to use to jog their memory? The snap of Tracey was in my wallet, but it might not do the trick. A photo of Gran would help; however, I didn’t own one less than eleven years old, and chasing after him for something more recent might let him know I have trouble thinking ahead.

I was passing by the newsstand outside the station when I got hit by an idea and bought a copy of every New York paper on the rack. I took out all the society sections, threw the rest into the trash, and stood on the platform glancing through each one. I’d finished with the *Tribune* and the *Times* and had just begun on the *Mirror* when the uptown Number Two pulled in.

I’m not exactly devoted to reading the chronicles of the other half, but in my daily pilgrimage from the front page to sports, I had with frustrating regularity flipped by photographs of Gran and his favorite polo pony, or Gran in the midst of some charity ball. They’d al-

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ways been a bothersome reminder that all of us weren't created equal, but now at least I had a chance of putting his photogenic qualities to use.

It was one of those silly ideas that are almost always a waste of money, but by the time we'd tunneled our way up to 135th Street, I'd found just what I was hoping for in the early edition of the *News*. On the page opposite the weddings was a picture of Granville Lowe II posing by the wing of a seaplane with his fiancée of one week, Sabrina K. Todd. "Isn't that just like him," I thought as I started up Lenox Avenue. "The bastard didn't even mention it."

The air wasn't warming up despite the sunshine, as if to let the city know that Indian summer was through. I was on my second pass across the same block of 137th, trying not to stand out too much as I scoured both sides of the tenement-lined street, when I finally saw the Caribe. No wonder it took them forty-five minutes to find the place. The only evidence of its existence was a handpainted sign on a door at the bottom of a flight of stairs. My first thought was that the Caribe must be a leftover speak trying to make ends meet on legal booze. My second thought was, why on earth did they want to come here in the first place? I revised "they" to "Tracey," as

I recalled Gran saying it had been her idea.

There's not an awful lot to recommend the Caribe. I imagine it looks better at night, all filled with smoke. The bartender was sweeping up and the singer was rehearsing with a piano player. All three were a portrait of Lincoln richer by the time I left.

It was wasted on the piano man. He'd been out in back on a smoke break when Tracey made the stink and stormed out. He did remember the well-tailored Caucasian couple sitting down in the middle of the first set, but he couldn't identify either one of them from the pictures. When he came off his break, he saw the man sitting alone, and somebody told him about the fracas.

The bartender wasn't much better. He identified Gran and Tracey as the arguing couple although he'd never been close enough to their table to hear the argument's details. As far as he knew, Tracey hadn't ever been there before and he was at a loss—my words, not his—to explain how she'd heard of this dump as the place to go. He confirmed Gran's estimates on arrival and departure times and pocketed my money.

I paid more attention to the singer for two reasons. She was the only one who'd actually spoken to Tracey. And I could tell

from her contracted pupils and erratic manner that she and the missing girl shared something besides the same sex. Her name was Juna Jamael. She was from Haiti and had probably got hooked on the stuff down there. I started off by showing her Gran's picture in the *News*.

"Yeah, they were here all right. I sit down and look at the insides of their hands and tell them the future they have." She pointed to the seaplane and giggled. "They fly off somewhere, these two, and now you want them back?"

Great, the next to last person to talk to her is a hophead who can't tell one white woman from another. I thought that but didn't say it. Instead I smiled and gently explained that it was only the man in the newspaper she should be looking at and the girl was the one in this snapshot. I suited action to word and gave her the photo Gran had given me.

She took one look and became effusively apologetic as only the drunk or doped-up can. "This is the one. I'm sorry, I am. Yeah, blonde and she wear a hat like this, too. You forgive me? I don't ever like to say wrong things. All dressed in blue she was. Very pretty," she added, her eyes an inch away from the picture. "She do something wrong?"

I made up some tale about the

girl being my long-lost cousin and asked what she could tell me about her. I didn't get much in exchange for my lie. Juna remembered being alone with Tracey for a minute or so, reading her palm, admiring her hat, getting a dollar tip, and leaving the table. The rest of her story was the same as the bartender's, or would have been if her mind had only let her speak coherently.

I hailed a cab on Lenox and went directly to the Pen and Pencil on East 45th. If I have to spend my work hours dragging questionable information out of questionable people, then I might as well enjoy myself in between. I ordered a late lunch of steak and made sure I got a receipt. Afterwards I felt hearty enough to phone Bill Donovan and warn him I was coming down to his office for a chat.

Donovan—no one ever called him Bill—was another alumnus from the class of '27. He was easy to find because you went to the Donovan Building, which faces the Harold Donovan Plaza, which is just a stone's throw east of Wall Street. The family began with railroads after the Civil War, and my particular Donovan, though only a great-grandnephew of the original Harold, was still living one of those charmed lives it takes at least three generations to come up with. The security

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guard on the main floor, the receptionist on the thirty-ninth, and the private secretary in front of his door didn't look particularly glad to see me, but then we hadn't all gone on road trips to Wellesley together. I can be a lot of fun.

"Stew. About time you paid me a visit, you handsome devil." I'm just repeating his words. "Come in and have a seat. Granny said you might be calling." The great thing about Donovan is he doesn't take himself seriously. Maybe it comes from being only a great-grand-nephew or maybe from his unimpressive appearance, but he always treats you like you're at least an equal. Even now, instead of settling down behind his acre of desk, Donovan led me to the other side of his oak paneled gymnasium with windows and sat beside me on a leather-covered couch. I remembered him as short and pallid, with the kind of looks that promise not to improve with age. A bald spot growing under his thin brown hair and a slight paunch were helping to keep that promise.

"Gran confided in me about Trace. If there's any way I can help." He must have seen the hesitation on my face. "Gran told me about the drugs, too. I have to admit it took me by surprise. I see Gran and Trace about once a week, and she's

always so normal. But then she wouldn't want people to notice, would she?"

I quizzed him in detail about his encounters with Tracey during the last six months, but true to his disclaimer, there seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary. It was a different matter when I turned the spotlight on Eric Nolan.

"I don't know what she sees in him." I suppose you could have read jealousy into Donovan's voice if you'd wanted to. "He's no good for her, and I guess this proves it." I asked if he'd ever noticed anything odd about Nolan. He smiled. "Are you testing my powers of observation? In Eric's case it's pretty obvious. I didn't know if it was drink or drugs, but I knew it was something."

I switched the topic to Friday night. Donovan had extended an open invitation, and Gran often took advantage of his hospitality to get away. "Doesn't Granny have a country house of his own?" I asked.

"Gran's not all that rich." I've got to do something about this smirk of mine. "Don't look at me that way, Stew. I suppose wealth is relative. Gran's father sold the meat and tanning factories shortly before his death. Gran lives off investments, things like that. I imagine he does fairly well. He's not marrying for money." Donovan



winked. "That's always a sign."

"What's he marrying for?"

"Gran doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve, but I assume it's love since there's no other motive. She's a nurse." Donovan liked Gran well enough, but the rich tend to have a natural cynicism. It's protection. "Love certainly seems to be her motive. Sabrina something-or-other. She treats him like a god." Donovan laughed. "She's even crazier for him than Marsha Brickman was. Remember her?"

Marsha was a Welleslean I particularly admired but who was so wrapped up in Gran she couldn't see straight. It made for an uncomfortable junior year. I laughed, too, pretending to enjoy the memory, then switched back to his weekend with Gran.

He'd arrived at the Donovan mansion shortly after midnight. It was a little over an hour's trip from the city, and I was pleased to see Gran's estimates of time dovetail so nicely with everyone else's. The only thing Gran hadn't mentioned was the phone call.

About ten minutes before he drove up, Tracey had telephoned, asking to speak to her brother. The butler said Mr. Lowe had yet to arrive and would she like to speak to Mr. Donovan. She said no, which must have been a disappointment to Mr. Donovan, and told

the butler to please have Gran call her at home as soon as he got there. She wanted to apologize. Gran was given the message and returned the call at about twelve ten, but she wasn't in. He tried off and on throughout the weekend, but there was never any answer. Donovan and Gran drove back into the city together Monday morning, both a little worried.

A buzzer buzzed on Donovan's desk, and the voice of a secretary reminded us of a meeting he was late for on the forty-third floor. Donovan escorted me out. He kept the executive elevator waiting until a common one arrived for me, then shook my hand and asked me to let him know if he could help in any way.

There's only one trouble with gracious people, I thought as I stepped out into the lobby. You can never tell how deeply something like this affects them.

I walked from the Donovan Building to a phone booth and bet a nickel Gran was at the penthouse. A maid told me to wait a minute, but fifteen seconds later he was on the horn and I was yelling at him. "You inconsiderate bastard, why didn't you tell me you were engaged?"

His laugh seemed a little weary. "Sorry, Stew. I didn't mean to cut you out of the news, but it doesn't seem very impor-

tant right now. Tell you what. I'll see if I can get a special dispensation from the old boys and sneak Sabrina into the dining room. Is it okay if she joins the three of us?"

"Sure, it'll make meeting Nolan a little more casual. By the way, I just saw Donovan. He says your sister telephoned the Long Island house shortly before you got there."

"Damn, I knew I'd forgotten something. I called her back but she wasn't in. Sorry, Stew. Is this important?"

"Well, it tells us where she was on Friday at midnight."

I spent the rest of Tuesday afternoon helping Max by trying to stay out of her hair. She was doing the usual checks—hospitals, hotels, morgues—but wasn't having any luck, good or otherwise. I was in my office looking over notes when she rapped on the glass. "Don't want to disturb, but I've done everything in a fifty mile radius without a bite. It doesn't help that I can't use her name. Do you want me to spread it to a hundred?"

"There any Jane Does at the morgue?" There weren't. "All right, make it a hundred. If we don't have a bite by tomorrow, I'll try to talk him into going official." I turned back to my notes and heaved a sigh, which I guess was a way of asking

Max to ask me how it was going.

"How's it going, boss?" Right on cue. The lady's a gem.

"The only glimmer takes me in a direction I don't want to go." I rapped a pencil on the desk, then leaned back in my chair, hands behind my head. "Taking everything at face value, it seems reasonable that our girl went to the Caribe in order to replenish her supply. Maybe she heard about it from Nolan. The chanteuse there takes heroin, maybe pushes it as well. Check with the Harlem police. See what they know about a woman named Juna Jamael." I spelled the name as best I could, and Max wrote it down. "Tracey was talking to her and later on asked Gran for fifty bucks. When he didn't dish it out, our girl went and disappeared." I sat forward and tossed the pencil out a window that happened to be open a crack at the top. "Who knows?"

I won't describe the Harvard Club dining room. It's more important for you to get a picture of Eric Nolan and Sabrina Todd. Let me just say the setting was nice, the food was good, and if you want to know more, you're going to have to talk an alumnus into taking you there.

It's hard to describe Nolan apart from his symptoms. Maybe

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if I'd seen a "before" picture, I could be more objective. Right now he was a jumpy scarecrow of about twenty-four with no more than a hundred and forty pounds hanging onto six feet of skeleton. His dark brown, stringy hair was worn long, and if you took the film off his eyes they were probably green. All in all, not a pretty sight, although, to his credit, Nolan tried his best to hide the signs of addiction.

Sabrina Todd impressed me for exactly the opposite reason. She hadn't squandered her birthright but was working hard to improve it. Short auburn hair framed her small but ordinary features, and as far as I could tell, she'd done everything from makeup to diet to God-knows-what to give nature a hand. The overall result was surprisingly appealing. She was doing her best to mimic the dress and manners of the upper crust but, when I pressed her, admitted to being a nurse at Metropolitan Hospital. Credentials like hers naturally start me thinking golddigger, so I thought it. But a minute's worth of observation told me I was wrong and Donovan had hit it. She was in love, and if Gran had been a ditch digger, she'd be doing her best to fit into that world, too. I liked her. She'd be good for him.

We were halfway through

the spinach and pinoli salad when I grabbed the conversation, shook it inside out, and turned it in a serious direction. Gran had briefed Sabrina before they came, so there was no little gasp when the topic was brought up.

At first Nolan denied everything, saying he didn't know a thing about it and that my questions were undoubtedly slanderous. This was just an automatic reaction, so I didn't blame him. I took the time to explain the physical signs of heroin addiction, pointing out as I went how he happened to have each and every one. Then Gran piped up and said he didn't give a good goddamn what Nolan did to himself, but Tracey was missing and everyone who cared anything about her safety had to be completely honest with me. Nolan calmed down and thought about it. From then on he at least gave the appearance of being candid.

"I've been on it for nearly a year. A musician friend introduced me. I'm getting it under control, though, I really am." He said it unconvincingly, but nobody was cruel enough to point that out. "You know, you're dead wrong about Trace."

"What do you mean?"

"She doesn't take drugs. She never has."

Gran forced air through his mouth in what can only be de-

scribed as a sigh gone exasperated. "He's not about to level with us. He doesn't want to be responsible for . . ."

"No, it's true," Nolan interrupted, putting a shaky hand on Gran's sleeve. "I wouldn't do that to Trace." The sleeve was removed from under his hand. "You believe me, don't you? She was the one who kept trying to make me quit. For hours she'd talk about how bad it was. Why would she take it up?"

It was hard to say if he believed what he was saying or not, but anything more about Tracey and heroin was met with a stone wall of denial. The rest of the meal I spent trying to pick up whatever bits of information lay this side of the wall.

An out-of-work actor provided him with his weekly supply. Nolan had few friends, and none of them—including Tracey, he emphasized—was on the stuff, although one or two might be alcoholics. Occasionally, when his regular connection dried up, he'd make a phone call and take a trip uptown; where he wouldn't say. I asked if it might be the Caribe, but Nolan claimed that he'd never heard of any such place, and that was as far as we got.

"You can tell he's lying," Gran said as we stood by the open door of a taxicab. Sabrina was planted firmly inside, having

already told me goodbye, and she was waiting for her fiancé to join her. "I felt like reaching across the table and shaking the truth out of him." Gran pounded the fist of one hand into the palm of the other. "What can we do, Stew?"

I said there was precious little we could do except go to the police and let them handle it. Gran said he'd think about it, then wished me good night.

I stood watching as their cab picked up speed and turned left into the sparse Fifth Avenue traffic. The night air was chilly, but I felt like walking. Time to break out the winter coat, I thought, pulling up the herringbone collar. All the way home, all I could think about was how much I hated winter.

Sometimes you take on a missing person or a robbery with the callous part of you kind of hoping it'll develop. But there was none of that in me when I told Max to make daily checks at the morgue. And there was nothing but regret in me when we got the news Wednesday afternoon. Tracey's body was fished out of the East River that morning at Peck Slip, just south of the Brooklyn Bridge, a bullet lodged in her brain. The preliminary autopsy said she'd been dead and in the water since early Sunday.



"Sunday." I sat at my desk and repeated it over and over, trying to rearrange the pieces. If this report was correct, then Tracey had been in hiding, either voluntary or forced, from late Friday to sometime Sunday. But why?

I telephoned to offer my condolences and to ask Gran if he still wanted me on the case. A sergeant answered. He didn't identify himself as a sergeant, but you get to know the kind of voice. I said "wrong number" and hung up. They'd be coming to see me soon enough.

Tracey's late night call to Long Island bothered me. The doorman had told Gran the last time he'd seen her was when the two of them left on Friday. And yet she supposedly called Donovan's from the penthouse somewhere around midnight. As far as I could see, there were four ways of explaining this. Either Tracey had lied about calling from the penthouse. Or some other woman called, pretending to be Tracey. Or Donovan got his butler to lie and there hadn't been any such call. Or the doorman was the liar and Tracey had come home and left again.

I took a cab over to Park Avenue and spent the better part of an hour chatting with Gran's doorman and eliminating possibility number four. Either this man was telling the truth or he

was good enough at lying to give up this penny ante job and run for public office. He even turned down my five bucks.

"Think of it as a tip," I said, stuffing the bill into the pocket of his gold-trimmed jacket. When he didn't take it out, I felt justified in asking one more question. "Do you recall what Miss Lowe was wearing when she and her brother left?"

"She had on something brown," he said after what seemed like a minute's worth of deliberation. "Dark brown with some design in it. Brown hat. That's as good as I can get you."

"You're sure? The singer at the nightclub said she was wearing a blue dress with a large white hat."

"I don't think I got it wrong. What does Mr. Lowe say?"

"He couldn't recall. It bothers me only because the body was dressed in brown when they dragged her out of the river." I took a second to think. "Of course she wasn't killed until Sunday, so she could have changed from blue to brown."

"Not here she didn't."

"Then again, if you saw her Friday in the brown, like you say, and forty-five minutes later she was wearing the blue . . ."

The elevator doors opened and my train of thought was broken by a police lieutenant who recognized me and insisted

on dragging me in. Mr. Granville Lowe had just told them about hiring a P.I. named Stew Cavanaugh, and there was a warm chair at the precinct house just waiting for me to fill it. I went willingly, thinking maybe I could find out something new if only I handled it right.

We spent all afternoon and most of the evening confirming facts Gran had already told them. But the medical examiner's report happened to be on the lieutenant's desk, and reading it upside down made all of this repetitive bother worthwhile.

Morphine, not heroin, had been discovered in the body. The M.E. was fairly sure it had been injected after death.

Then there was the scene of the crime. A beat patrolman had seen a high heel lying by itself on a midtown pier. He remembered something about a river corpse, took the heel into the morgue, and, in one of those flukes that make up good police work, found it had broken off from Tracey's left shoe. The obvious conclusion was that she'd been killed there, only yards from the old Lowe Tanning Factory. Her body was then dumped into the river, mixed in with the industrial garbage her family had spent a lifetime producing, and by Wednesday had floated down to Peck Slip.

It was late when I got back

to the office and the last thing I needed was the first thing I saw—Eric Nolan pacing up and down in front of my frosted glass. I let him in, sat him in my most uncomfortable chair, and poured him a cup of day-old coffee. He took it with nervous hands. I assumed he had read the papers.

"They say there were drugs in her body," he finally blurted. "She didn't get them from me, I don't care what you think." He was bending and unbending a paper clip from my desk. "I never use morphine. Tracey didn't use morphine. And I'm not going to tell you who my connection is in Harlem, so don't ask."

My first impulse was to hand him his hat and kick him down the stairs, but I resisted. He needed to talk. I racked my brain for a neutral subject that might still prove useful and finally settled on Sabrina Todd. He was noticeably calmer now. "I'd been wanting to meet Sabrina. Tracey would tell me . . . We met for the first time last night. I don't think Gran's known her more than a month. Tracey used to call her Nurse Ninny." The recollection triggered something. Nolan's eyes focused off in the distance, and his mouth turned up in a grin. Then the giggling started. A full minute later he was still giggling.

I poured Nolan into a cab, then walked the stairs up to the office again. It was time, I felt, as I sat down at my desk and pulled out the index cards. Time to play games. I put down all the facts and all the names, one to a card, and spent the next few hours rearranging them on the desktop. This may seem infantile, but it's the only way I can work, to strip the whole thing of personality and lay it out in front of me like a puzzle. It was after one when I telephoned Gran, woke him up and told him to be at my office at ten with his checkbook.

He came on time. I listed my expenses and the daily fee for three days even though it was only the morning of the third. I asked him to write the check now, and he didn't balk. I handed his signed check to Max and told her to file it. That's a code phrase. It means "go posthaste and get cash." Max grabbed her coat and hat and excused herself.

After the door was closed, Gran shook his head in confusion. "What was that all about?"

I took a perfectly good pencil and crossed to the sharpener on the wall. At some point during this ritual I said it. "If you had to kill your sister, Gran, fine. But why'd you have to hire me?" I was facing the wall. The only sounds were the turning of the crank and the shaving

of the sharp pencil.

I crossed back to the desk and forced myself to look. His face was ashen. "The morphine injection after death set me on the track," I said, trying to keep things professional. "Then there was the problem of the blue or brown dress, the bad snapshot, and, of course, the call to Donovan's house. You really slipped up there."

"You didn't have to do that with the check. I still would have paid. I'm no welsher, Stew."

The only way to get through this was to be businesslike. "You and Tracey left the penthouse at nine. She was wearing the brown. I don't know where you said you were taking her, but you ended up by the tanning factory. That's where you shot her. I imagine Sabrina gave her the injection. Morphine, really! That just reeks of hospital supply.

"You dumped her into the river by the factory drainage. Sabrina dressed up in one of Tracey's outfits—blue with a hat to hide the features, plus makeup and a wig. You went to a Harlem dive where no one knew you and staged a scene so they'd all remember. The singer there even remembered her face, but I was too stupid to believe her. That's where your bad snapshot did you proud. Very smart."

There wasn't the slightest re-

sponse, but it didn't stop me. "You drove directly out to Long Island and used Donovan for an alibi. I imagine Sabrina's alibi is just as good. She was the one who added the touch of calling and pretending Tracey was still alive. Only you should have had her say she was at a pay phone. That would have been better.

"When you came back to town Monday, the body hadn't been found. You needed to buy time and still appear like a worried brother. That's where I came in, someone who would do just enough investigating to back up your story."

He tried to speak but his throat was too dry.

"But the dope fiend angle's your best. You take advantage of some poor loser like Nolan who's hooked on the stuff. Who's going to take his word over yours? Throw in the story about Tracey dragging you to a Harlem club, stick a little morphine in her arm, and you have me running around like Charlie Chan in an opium den."

I took the newly sharpened pencil and just about broke it in half.

"You used everyone, right? Donovan. Me. Nolan. And you never had any intention of marrying Sabrina, poor sap. The only thing I'm not too clear on, pal, is motive. Help me out.

Something to do with her inheritance?"

"What inheritance?" Gran's mouth trembled as he tried to laugh. "I've gone through all of mine and most of hers. My guardianship would have ended when she turned twenty-one, so . . . You don't know how much it takes to live decently."

I didn't answer but turned to the phone and dialed.

"Wait a minute!" There was desperation in his face and I wasn't sure what I'd do if he started to plead friendship. I put down the receiver and waited, telling myself I could always pick it up again.

"You're being ridiculous," he snorted, his voice full of disdain. "She was killed Sunday. The autopsy said so. And Sunday I was on Long Island."

That was all I needed. "I'll tell them to check the body for tannic acid and whatever else runs out of a tanning factory. They shouldn't have any trouble pushing it back to Friday."

The last glimmer of hope drained from his face. "How did you know about the preserving properties . . ."

I picked up the receiver and redialed. "It was one of the little-known facts you regaled us with in school. You know how it is with your heroes, Gran. You remember just about everything they say."

FICTION

# The Lady Wore Black

by Hugh B. Cave



*Illustration by Marc Yankus*

**I**gnoring the familiar rustle of leather being dragged over the living room carpet, eighty-year-old Emma Bell continued to watch the six o'clock evening news on television. A cat's harness was dropped at her feet, and the bearer gazed up at her with demanding blue eyes.

Without even looking down, Emma stubbornly wagged her head. "Not this evening, Tai-Tai. My arthritis is acting up."

The cat, a Siamese blue point, replied with an indignant meow that, if translated—and, of course, Emma could always translate—clearly said, "This can't go on! It's been three days now and we need our exercise, all three of us!"

"No, Tai-Tai."

Tai-Tai looked toward the bedroom doorway and summoned the old lady's other companion, a much younger Siamese seal point. Yum-Yum, named by Emma after the character in her favorite Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, obediently appeared from that room with *her* harness, and dropped it beside the one at Emma's feet.

Both cats—the large blue-gray and white one with lavender ears, and the smaller, light brown one with a chocolate-colored face and paws

—then sat like statues in front of Emma's sofa, gazing relentlessly at her. And would continue to sit, the old lady knew, until they had their way.

"Oh, all right, my darlings. If you insist. But only a short one because I really do hurt."

They understood her—they always did—and meowed in unison.

At eighty, Emma Bell had been without a husband for nine years, but having had Tai-Tai for eight years and Yum-Yum for five, she no longer suffered acutely from loneliness. She had loved her husband dearly, though, and still always wore black, and vowed she always would.

They lived, the three of them, in total harmony in a small cottage in rural South Carolina. What they lived on was the monthly social security check Emma received as a widow, plus the interest from a modest nest egg lodged in the local bank. That paid the taxes and bought food for the three of them.

It also financed the daily sip of brandy Emma's aging doctor had prescribed to help her endure the pain of her arthritis.

The harnesses buckled and leashes attached, Emma led the cats out the front door, transferring both leashes to her left



hand so she could make sure the door locked itself behind her. It was certainly not a crowded neighborhood, but there had been a number of break-ins of late. "We have to be extra careful, darlings."

At the end of the driveway she turned to the right, along a road that curled attractively through pine woods, with shallow ditches on either side. In some places the ditches held water, and water harbored frogs that filled the evening with their throaty music. The clean country air smelled of wild honeysuckle and pine needles. Tai-Tai walked sedately on one side of her and Yum-Yum strained to accelerate the pace on the other.

The younger Siamese was always the more impetuous. Looking down at her, the old lady wagged her head in mild reproach. "Can't you see I'm limping? Please, darling, have a little consideration." The cat actually stopped straining. "There, that's better. Thank you."

At the first intersection Emma, as always, carefully looked both ways before starting across. Her eyes were still sharp; she wore glasses only when reading; but her aging legs grew stiffer every day, it seemed. Of course, with so few

houses around, there was not much danger from cars. But the neighborhood was home to one young man, the son of the town's police chief, who seemed to think he owned every road he raced his pickup over. Twice in the past month neighborhood dogs had been run down and killed by someone. If not by him, then by whom?

The young man in question was not driving his pickup this evening, however. When Emma and her companions approached his house, he was seated on his front porch steps with a bourbon bottle in one hand. His slack face twisted into a grin under its shock of blond hair. He flapped his empty hand in a salute. "Evenin', Mrs. Bell. Out for your conshatutational?"

Emma politely nodded. "Good evening, Maynard." One must always do the proper thing. But to her cats, after they were past, she said with a frown, "Did you see that, darlings? Always a bottle. Always. He even drives his truck with a bottle or a beer can in one hand. And he uses drugs, too; I'm sure he does. I don't know what kind, but he uses them. He's dangerous, that young man is."

The cats meowed to let her know they were being attentive.

"And he's the one breaking into people's houses around here, too," Emma declared. "I'm sure of *that*. Where else would he get all the money he must spend on his drugs and drinking? He never does a lick of honest work, and his folks wouldn't be giving him money to ruin his life with, you can be certain. If they know what-all he does, of course. Maybe they don't."

Tai-Tai and Yum-Yum declared their agreement. The walk continued.

"All right," the old lady announced at the next crossroad. "We'll go down here and back home along Linden because I don't want to have to say 'good evening' to that man again. Come, darlings." And so she added a quarter mile to the length of the return journey, pleasing her two companions enormously but increasing her own torment.

Because she had difficulty sleeping, Emma usually stayed up and watched television at night, at least until the eleven o'clock news ended. If the programs happened to be of interest to Tai-Tai and Yum-Yum, they too sat on the living room sofa, one on each side of her, and watched with her. If they were bored with what they saw, they left her and went to bed. All three used the same double

bed, the two cats sleeping outside the covers, at Emma's feet.

Tonight, tired and in more pain than usual from her unwise walk, the old lady stayed up late. It was after midnight when she at last turned off the TV and shuffled into the kitchen for her ounce of brandy, then went to the bedroom. The cats were already there.

Gazing down at them for a moment, she thought how fortunate she was to have two such loyal and loving creatures to keep her company. Then, knowing she would not sleep and would have to walk about from time to time to ease the pain, she simply lay down on the bed in her black dress and closed her eyes.

But she could not even doze. From ankle to hip, her left leg ached like an infected tooth. No matter how she turned, seeking a position of relief, the ache persisted.

The luminous, snail-slow hands of the electric clock on the chest of drawers near the bed stood nearly at two A.M. when she heard a door creak open.

In the whole house there was but one door that creaked. It led from the back yard into the small laundry room off the kitchen, and it had been creaking now for at least two years,

in spite of her oiling the hinges. It must be warped, the man at the local hardware store had said. At the bottom of it was a small swinging gate by which the cats went in and out. But the gate didn't creak; the door itself did.

A glance at the foot of the bed assured the old lady the cats were still with her. Unafraid but puzzled, she wriggled painfully off the bed and went padding through the house to the kitchen.

There stood the intruder at the sink—the same young man she had spoken to earlier when passing the police chief's house. He had the cupboard door above the sink open and was reaching for the bottle of brandy she kept there.

How had he known she kept it there? Had he watched her at times through the sliding glass doors leading to the back porch when she poured her bedtime drink? Even tonight, perhaps?

Emma jerked to a halt and put her hands on her hips. "Young man, what do you think you're doing?"

He took the bottle from the shelf anyway, before turning to face her. His features, all slack, took on the unwholesome gray of spoiled liver and shaped themselves into something one might find in an ape-house at

a zoo. His white shirt was almost as gray with grime. His khaki pants were urine-stained. His bare feet were as nasty as the rest of him.

Drunk, Emma decided. And probably high on drugs, as well. That was the word they used, wasn't it? High? She fixed him with her gaze. "So you *are* the one who's been breaking into houses." Not very often did her voice go shrill like that. "Well, you won't get away with it this time, even if your father *is* the chief of police! You'll have *me* to deal with."

Something brushed against her ankle and she glanced down. It was the blue point, Tai-Tai, rubbing against her but peering warily at the intruder. Suddenly Yum-Yum appeared from the bedroom, too.

The cat with the chocolate-colored face and paws voiced a shrill meow of disapproval and launched herself like a furry rocket at the intruder's chest. It was ever thus with the seal point. Act on instinct; think later.

Too tardily the old lady cried. "No, Yum-Yum, no!"

The leer on the thief's face widened as he swung the bottle by its neck. There was a crunch as the weapon made contact with the cat's head. Deflected in mid leap, Yum-Yum must

have been dead before she crashed into the refrigerator door. At least, she uttered no cry but simply fell to the floor, a twisted brown ball with a shattered head or broken neck or both, while Emma Bell stood there gazing down at her in horror.

"You beast! You filthy beast!" Emma screamed, and with arms outflung and fingers twitching, hurled *her* frail body at the intruder.

He lashed out with the bottle again. Again there was a dull crunch, but with a difference. As her legs melted under her and she slumped to the floor, Emma moaned and put her hands to her head.

The young man took one look at what he had accomplished and sucked in a sputtering breath. The bottle, falling from his hand, struck Emma on the hip and rolled onto the floor without shattering. He retrieved it. Clutching it by the neck again, he backed slowly out of the room and into the laundry, where he had left open the door to the yard. On reaching that, he wheeled and ran stumbling into the night.

Emma Bell somehow succeeded in turning her head a few inches, looking for the cat that was still alive. The blue point was in a crouch ten feet

away, ready to leap. Her quivering tail was twice as bushy as usual. Her shoulders were coiled springs. Her haunches had never looked more powerful. But she seemed uncertain of what to do, and her gaze flicked back and forth, back and forth, from the old lady to the crumpled body of Yum-Yum.

"Tai-Tai." Emma's voice was barely audible, not even a whisper. "Come here."

The cat crawled to her with nostrils twitching, and sniffed at the ooze of blood now coloring Emma's face. She peered into the woman's glazed eyes, her own bright ones only inches away.

The old lady struggled to move one arm and at last, with a tremendous effort, she touched the cat with her fingertips. "Did you . . . did you see what he did to our Yum-Yum?" she breathed. "He killed her, Tai-Tai. Oh, darling, make him pay!"

"Mrrreeeuw!"

The eyes of Emma Bell closed then. Her fingertips were still. But the blue point remained there for another hour or so, peering into her dead face, before departing.

**K**nowing he had killed the old woman, Maynard Albro did not return home by way of the

road. He took to the pine woods instead. This was not exactly his style; he was more used to driving hell-for-leather along that road in his pickup. As a consequence, when he finally emerged from the woods into his own back yard, he was exhausted. Dragging his feet, he staggered to the back door and clawed it open.

He had not locked the house on leaving it, even though he was temporarily alone in it. His parents had gone that morning to the state capital, where his father was to attend a seminar for police chiefs. They would be away for several days.

Once in the house, however, he did lock the back door behind him, then went to the front and locked that. Then he went to the windows and secured those. Finally, in the living room, he slumped into a chair with Emma Bell's bottle of brandy and drank deeply from the bottle and reflected on what he had done.

Stupid . . . he shouldn't have left the old lady there on the kitchen floor. Sooner or later someone was bound to wonder where she was, and investigate. "You dumb jerk, Albro, what's the matter with you? Go back there and clean up!"

He went back through the pine woods, still carrying the bottle because he guessed he

would need it. Along with the brandy he carried a long-handled shovel, and before going into the house, the back door of which was still open as he had left it, he groped his way into Emma Bell's flower garden and began to dig a grave.

Fortunately, the earth there was soft enough for even a drunken man to handle with ease. First Emma's beloved husband, then Emma herself had lovingly grown flowers there. In half an hour the grave was ready, and he went into the house for the body, with an eye peeled for the big gray and white cat lest it attack him as the smaller one had done.

The cat was not in the kitchen, however. Either it was someplace else in the house—he wasn't about to look—or it had ducked out. To hell with it. Lifting the old lady, he carried her to the garden, marveling at how light she was. Then he returned for the cat he had killed, and laid it beside her.

After filling the grave, he put back the clumps of zinnias, petunias, and marigolds he had carefully removed before digging it. No one would ever in the world suspect a body was laid to rest there. "You're pretty smart, Albro, you know that? And you done it in the dark, with only a quarter moon up

there to see by. So finish up now and clear out, you hear?"

Back in the kitchen he pulled a strip of paper towels off a roll above the counter, wet it under a tap, and on hands and knees rubbed up every last spot of blood from the woman and cat. Then with the towels in his pants pocket and the brandy bottle in one hand again, he departed.

Twice on the way home he tipped the bottle to his mouth and deeply drank. When he got there and slumped again into his chair in the living room, he drank more. Earlier that evening, on the porch steps, he had emptied a nearly full bottle of bourbon. Now the room's off white walls and green curtains began to spin, and he closed his eyes to keep from spinning with them, and reviewed what he had done.

It was okay. Nobody would look for a grave in the old lady's flower garden. Folks would think she just wandered off somewhere. Plenty of people thought she was a little crazy anyway, still wearing black for a husband that died all that long ago.

Miserable old black-dress widow woman, why hadn't she been asleep like she ought to've been, instead of causing all this trouble?

He heard his mother's antique clock, on the bookcase, chime thrice. Then with his eyes closed against the undulations of the room, he slept.

When he awoke, the lamp by his chair was still on and the clock's hands stood at ten past seven. It had to be ten past seven in the evening because there was no daylight at the windows.

At one of the windows something was scratching.

Not only scratching; it was meowing. And even more than meowing. *Howling*. Where had he heard a sound like that before? He remembered. It was the night he went to the local graveyard to swipe some fresh flowers off a grave, to give to Mom next day for her birthday. There'd been a high wind wailing through the big trees there. And among the stones. Now it was a cat.

The lamp beside his chair had a three-way bulb. He turned it up bright, and the cat's image appeared behind the window pane as if by magic. *Her* cat, the gray and white one, the one he hadn't killed.

The light touched its eyes and they were like Fourth of July sparklers. The howling increased to an accusation that



lanced his eardrums and filled him with fear.

"Shut up!" He stormed to the window and banged on the glass almost hard enough to break it. "Shut up, damn you! Get out of here!"

The cat leaped from the sill and disappeared into the dark of the yard.

Maynard Albro returned to his chair. The pounding in his head was all but unbearable, and so was the wrenching cramp in his gut. He shouldn't have hit the booze so hard after so many joints of pot; the combination was stupid. It wasn't his fault, though, was it? What the hell had they expected, leaving him alone like this with no one to fix a meal for him, no one for him to talk to, no one even to nag him for drinking too much. He lifted the brandy bottle and gulped another long drink. The cat was back.

"Mrrreeouuw!" God, that howl! It was enough to tear a man's scalp off.

Up from his chair, he went reeling into his parents' bedroom. No way was any stupid cat going to drive him out of his mind while there was a shotgun in the house. Even if it was only a cheap twelve-gauge single-shot his miserly old man had owned for years. It would damn well blow a cat away.

With the weapon in his hands he staggered back through the living room, accompanied by a chorus of cat-screams from the thing at the window. Stealthily he unlocked the front door.

But when he lurched out onto the wooden front porch, he stumbled over something there, and before he could regain his balance, he crashed into the porch railing. When he recovered from that and went plunging down the steps and around the house to the window where the cat was, the cat had disappeared again.

Cursing his own clumsiness, Albro returned to the porch and sought the thing that had tangled his feet and tripped him. Picking it up in anger, he saw by the light from the living room that it was a dress. A black dress. In a hand that wouldn't stay steady he held it away from him and walked into the living room. Halting by the lamp, he looked at it.

A black dress. The same dress the old lady was wearing when he buried her. It was damp all over and blotchy with earth. Pine needles and bits of dead leaves clung to the fabric. As if she had crawled here in it.

Dropping it on the carpet, he sank into his chair and sat there staring at it like one hypnotized. Not for half an hour did

he stop shaking. Even then his eyes stayed bigger than normal and his heart continued its scary pounding.

That cat did not come back. But the dress was there at his feet and he had to do something with it. Had to get rid of it. Leaning from his chair, he gingerly picked it up, then rose and walked very slowly with it, holding it at arm's length, through the kitchen to the back door and out into the yard. At the end of the yard was a concrete incinerator his father had built to burn rubbish in. But the dress was too damp to catch fire when he held matches to it.

After using up half a book of paper matches and growing more panicky with each failure, he forced himself to stop. "Use your head, stupid. Get some newspaper!" That morning's paper lay on the kitchen table, still in its plastic wrapper. It had been tossed onto the front lawn by the carrier after his folks left for the capital, and he had brought it in. He hadn't looked at it, of course. He never messed with newspapers.

The paper did it. The dress caught and burned, and he stood there watching it. The smoky orange light flickered on his face and the terror slowly faded from his eyes. But had he looked beyond the incinerator to where

the yard merged into the pine woods, he would have seen other eyes watching him, close to the ground.

Under the influence of alcohol and marijuana, Maynard Albro slept most of the following day. Because he'd been afraid to take off his soiled clothes and crawl into bed properly, he did his sleeping on top of the covers. On waking just before dark, he fed himself from the refrigerator with cold meatloaf his mother had left, a raw egg in beer, and half a loaf of bread layered with peanut butter.

Then, feeling better and convinced he no longer had anything to fear, he looked for the brandy bottle and finished what was left in it.

Not enough. A three mile ride in the pickup carried him to the town's only liquor store, where he spent his last few dollars on two more bottles. Not brandy this time. The cheapest on-sale whisky the store had to offer.

They knew him in this town where his father was chief of police. The young woman who took his money looked with unconcealed distaste at his stubbled face and filthy clothes, but offered no comment.

On his way home he drank

from the bottle, arriving there just after dark. Ten minutes later, while sprawled in his living room chair, he heard the cat at the window again.

"Mrrreeoow!"

"Oh no you don't, damn you! Not tonight!" The nearest weapon at hand was the bottle he was drinking from, on the lamp table beside his chair. Lurching to his feet, he seized and hurled it. It exploded against the wall a foot from the window and fell to the floor in a rain of shattered glass. The cat did not even leap from the sill, but continued to peer in at him.

"Mrrreeoow!"

This time he wasn't drunk, he told himself. He would know how to be stealthy. The shotgun was leaning in the corner by the front door, where he had left it last night after his unsuccessful attempt to kill the cat. Elaborately pretending he was not even aware of the cat's keening, he strolled to the door. One hand reached for the weapon; the other silently pushed the door open.

But he did not step out. On the porch in front of him, right where the other had been, was a second black dress. Or was it the same black dress? Anyway, it was hers, the one he had buried her in. Like the first, it lay

there in a soggy heap and was smeared with earth, as though she had crawled here in it.

He didn't pick this one up. His hands, his whole body, shook so hard he couldn't. Like something made of wooden parts and activated by springs and gears, he backed away from it and jerked up the twelve-gauge and squeezed the trigger.

The black dress moved a foot or so toward the porch steps, leaving a jagged rent in the porch flooring.

Scarcely able to breathe, Albro slammed the door shut. Then he ran with the gun into his bedroom and slammed that door, too.

Seated on the bed, staring wide-eyed at a blank wall, he told himself the old woman couldn't have crawled here. Not tonight, not last night. There was no way she could have done such a thing. She was dead. Dead, dead, dead. In the ground. Rotting.

But the dress. How had it got here?

A scratching sound behind him made him turn his head in panic. That wall was not blank; it was an outside wall with two windows. At one of them something gray and white, on the sill, peered in at him and scratched the glass with sharp claws.

"Mrrreeooow!"

His hands still gripped the shotgun. They jerked it up and again he squeezed the trigger, but nothing happened. He had not reloaded it. The cat looked in at him with what had to be a sneer, its face clearly visible in the light from the lamp on his dresser. Then, with languid lack of haste, it leaped from the sill and vanished.

All right, the dress. No matter how it had got here, he had to get *rid* of it. And this time he would make *sure*.

He went to the front porch and gingerly picked it up. Walked around to the back yard with it. In the toolhouse there his father kept a container of gasoline for the lawn mower. He carried that to the incinerator and this time soaked the garment after dropping it in. Then he returned the can to the toolhouse because everything had to be done right.

Returning to the incinerator, he stood a few feet away from it and held a lighted match to a crumpled ball of newspaper. When the paper caught fire, he tossed it onto the fuel-soaked dress.

No question this time. After the first big *whoof* of flame and smoke, the dress burned brightly until nothing was left but ash. Even though drunk he couldn't

be mistaken. This time it would not reappear.

Still, there was no real reprieve in store for him tonight. Every few minutes, hour after hour, that accusing meow pursued him. Though the doors and windows were again locked, no matter where he went in the house he heard it. Living room, kitchen, his bedroom, his parents' bedroom, there was no escaping it anywhere. And whenever he heard it, it reminded him of the sound in the cemetery the night he had swiped the flowers.

A cat cry but not *only* a cat cry. Something more. Something meant to drive him crazy.

It was after four in the morning when he at last succeeded in drinking himself to sleep.

**H**is room was dark when he again struggled up from the depths of his liquor haze into a murky kind of awareness. The light was on. In fact, all the lights in the house were on, he discovered when he went stumbling about in an effort to orient himself. He must have turned them on last night when the cat was trying to get to him, and left them on when he finally hit the bed. Well, okay. With the lights on he felt safer. What time was it, anyway?

He peered at the watch on his wrist. He'd neglected to wind it. There was a battery wall clock in the kitchen, he vaguely remembered. He blinked up at it. Seven forty.

Something was scratching at the kitchen door. A *door* this time, not a window.

"Mrrreeoouw!"

"I'll *kill* you!" The gun. Where had he put the gun? For hours last night he'd carried it around with him while he prowled the house, hoping to see the damned thing at a window and get a shot at it. The gun must be *somewhere*.

He searched the house. Found the weapon at last under his bed. Loading it, he went back to the kitchen. But the scratching at the door had ceased.

A drink. He had to have a drink. Where was the bottle?

He had bought two, he distinctly remembered. Had killed one last night before falling asleep. The other had to be around somewhere.

No. He'd hurled one at the window where the cat was, and missed, and watched it explode against the wall. He was out of liquor. Out of money, too. And anyway, he wouldn't dare leave the house now and drive to the store.

He licked his dry lips and began sobbing. Then heard a

scratching sound at the *front* door.

This time, by God . . . !

Shotgun in hand, he stole through the living room and jerked the door open. And despite a backward leap, the old lady's gray-white cat was a perfect target, facing him halfway across the porch with only another of those damned black dresses between them. The gun was loaded. All he had to do was fire it.

But a town police car was at the foot of the front walk, by the mailbox, and its door was open, and one of his father's cops, Andy Cramer, was stepping out of it. With a triumphant "Mrrreeoouw!" the old lady's cat fled into the night.

The cop strode up the walk, climbed the steps, and scowled at the shotgun in Albro's hands. He was a man of forty or so, with long arms and big shoulders. "You fixin' to *shoot* that cat, Maynard?"

"I—no, I—well, it was drivin' me crazy!"

"Drivin' you crazy, Maynard? I know that cat well. Belongs to old Emma Bell down the road, and it's a purebred Siamese, one of the best-behaved cats you'll ever meet. What you talkin' about, drivin' you crazy? You drunk again?"

Reaching out, he took the

shotgun from Albro's hands and checked it. Removing the shell, he handed the weapon back. Then, stooping to pick up the black dress on the porch floor between them, he said, scowling, "What's this?"

Maynard Albro took a backward step and began shaking again. His hands were so unsteady, the barrel of the gun beat a tattoo against the door-frame.

"A dress?" Andy Cramer's gaze lifted to the youth's face again. "What's a dress doin' here on your porch?"

"I—dunno."

"By God, it's one of *hers*." Andy turned to peer into the dark of the yard, where Tai-Tai had disappeared. "What's goin' on here, Maynard? *Her* cat, *her* dress, you with a gun this time of night . . . Looks like it's a good thing I stopped. Wouldn't have, except I seen all the lights on and knew your folks was away. Are you stoned?"

Albro's mouth uncontrollably twitched now. "N-n-no, I'm n-n-not."

"What's this dress doin' here, then? Tell me!" Andy held the garment up between them by its shoulders. "It's hers, all right. She never wears anything different. Why's it here on your porch, all wet and dirty like this?"

"I d-d-don't know."

"Get in the car, Maynard. I think we better call on that little lady and see what you been up to."

It was at Emma Bell's house that Maynard Albro broke down. Two reasons. One: when they got into the car, the cop thrust the black dress at him, saying, "Here, *you* hold this," and of course to Maynard it was like being ordered to hold *all* of what he had buried. And two: when they were almost to Emma's house, he couldn't help but look toward the back yard flower garden, and there where he had dug the grave he saw the gray and white cat again. It was just sitting there in the light of the quarter moon, its eyes aglow, watching as the car slowed down to make the turn into the driveway.

He confessed in the driveway, so instead of going into the house or even the garden, Andy Cramer drove him to the police station. But a little while later, with another man from the station, Andy did go into Emma's house to complete his investigation.

In Emma's bedroom closet he found three black dresses hanging, all identical to the one he had discovered on the Albros' porch. Alongside them was an empty hanger, and under that,



on the floor, were two more hangers that must have fallen from the same rod.

Shaking his head at this discovery, Andy said to his companion, "These dresses are what she always wore, and it looked like she had quite a few of them, all alike. I can see how finding one on his front porch three nights running would scare young Albro into talking. But how do you suppose those dresses got from here to there, Joe?"

The man spoken to merely stared at the dresses in the closet and shrugged his shoulders.

Andy struggled to answer his

own question. "They were all wet and dirty, the kid said. So was the one I seen. There's plenty of bare ground between here and there, and water in some of those roadside ditches. If some animal was to drag a thing like a dress from here to there and didn't want to be seen, it wouldn't travel on the road, either, would it?"

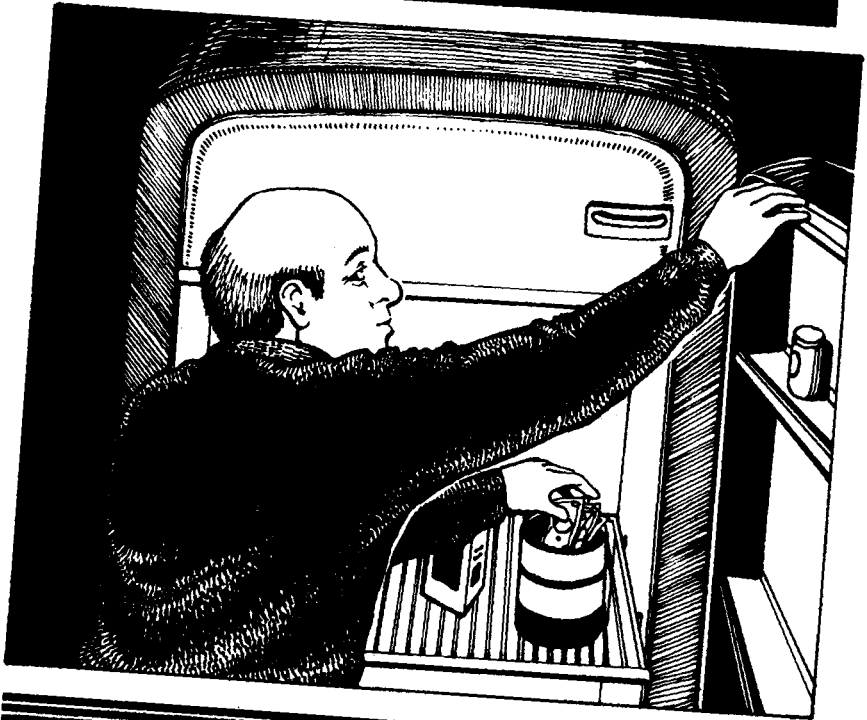
Silent for a moment, he tugged at an ear while concentrating on the problem. Then with a frown he said, "Joe, you suppose that cat of Emma's . . . ? It's a whole heap smarter'n most cats, you know. I swear it understood everything the old lady said to it—always."

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FICTION

# Playing Ball with Ozzie

by James A. Noble



The old baseball field next to Watson's Implement Factory wasn't much to look at, but each year when it came time for the big showdown between the Harbor Freight stevedores and the machinists from Watson's, you could depend on Ozzie to spruce it up.

The game had developed into a popular contest in the little town and nearly everyone came to watch. Ozzie felt a particular pride in knowing he was making a contribution to such an important event.

Every third weekend in July, he'd put his rake, shovel, and a bag of lime into his wheelbarrow and push it the half mile from his small shack to the baseball field. With loving care, he would smooth out the dusty ground, cut down the weeds, and lay out the base and foul lines with the lime. Normally, Herbert Haskell, plant foreman at Watson's, would leave a small power mower there so he could cut the few patches of grass in the outfield. Before Ozzie had retired, he had worked under Mr. Haskell at the implement factory and he had always appreciated the foreman's understanding and patience in explaining those jobs he had difficulty comprehending.

One July, about a week be-

fore the big game, Mr. Haskell came to visit Ozzie as he always did in order to give him a few dollars for the work on the ball-field and to offset the cost of the lime.

"You know, Ozzie, the company always appreciated the hard work you did for us over the years."

"Aw, shucks, Mr. Haskell." Ozzie looked down at the floor, embarrassed.

"And your loyalty."

Ozzie shrugged shyly, unused to such praise.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," continued Haskell. "Loyalty. You can probably guess we want to win this game against Harbor Freight very badly."

"Heck, Mr. Haskell. We got the best team. We'll beat 'em."

Haskell took his handkerchief and knocked some dust from an overstuffed chair and sat down. "I'm not so sure. Those stevedores are big powerful men. They can hit a lot of home runs. Oh, we got a good outfield, but if they keep slug-ging the ball over the fence, our players will never get a chance at it. You understand?"

Ozzie nodded in agreement, a bit too vigorously.

Haskell stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Say, how much trouble would it be to move that

outfield fence back about . . . oh, five feet? You know, just to give our team a little edge."

"It'd be easy. It's nothing but a wooden slat snow fence. But how will our team hit any home runs then?"

"Ozzie, our team can barely hit the ball out of the infield. It won't make any difference to us."

Ozzie scratched his head. "Ain't that cheating?"

"I was talking about loyalty." Haskell reached in his pocket and slowly counted out five ten dollar bills on the arm of the chair.

Ozzie reached for the money, but Haskell put his hand on top of it.

"One more thing," added Haskell. "You know how big and lumbering those dockworkers are. Well, they're really slow when rounding the bases. Why don't we move first, second, and third base toward the outfield about five feet, also? You know, just so we have a better chance of picking them off." Three more tens were added to the stack of bills.

"I'll get right to it," said Ozzie, giggling at the sight of the money.

"Not in broad daylight, for Pete's sake. Wait until the night before the game."

"Oh, sure . . . right," said Oz-

zie as he snatched at the money.

"Good." Haskell rose to let himself out. "You know what to do now?"

"Right. Move the outfield fence back five feet . . . move the three bases five feet towards the outfield . . ."

"And remember," said Haskell, opening the door. "Loyalty."

After his ex-foreman left, Ozzie danced a little jig around the house with the money and then carefully put it in the tin can in the refrigerator where he hid his other valuables.

A half hour later, he received another visitor, Butch Lemar, dockmaster from Harbor Freight. He was carrying a portable television and a fifth of whisky.

"Hiya, Ozzie. How you been?"

"Good, Butch. What you got there?"

"Some of the fellows down at the dock thought you might like to have a television. Don't seem right, a retired man like you not having a TV."

"Gee, thanks."

"Aw, don't thank me. The dockworkers are your friends. How about a little drink?"

Ozzie got two glasses, wiped them clean with his shirttail, and set them on the television Butch had put on the floor. Butch sat down in the over-

stuffed chair and poured.

"We do you a favor, you do us a favor. You get it . . . friend?"

Ozzie nodded while drinking the whisky and spilled most of it over his shirt front.

Butch poured him another. "You know I'm in the big game next week and some of the other players from the docks don't get around those bases as fast as they used to. If you could see your way clear to move home plate toward the infield about five or six feet, we wouldn't have to run so far to first base or from third. That just might prevent us from being thrown out so often."

Ozzie looked down at the television. He was trying to figure out what the cumulative effect of Mr. Haskell's request and Butch's would be. "Move home plate . . ."

"Right," affirmed Butch. "We'd get more home runs, too, because the outfield fence would be closer."

Ozzie was only half listening. He was still figuring.

"Ozzie?"

Ozzie had his head laid back and his eyes tightly closed. He was still trying to figure it out.

"Ozzie!"

Ozzie awakened from his concentration.

"Will you do it?" asked Butch.

"Oh . . . sure. You want me

to move home plate five feet into the infield."

"And while you're at it, move the pitcher's mound back, too. I don't want anyone noticing the shorter throwing distance to the plate. The pitchers would sense that right off."

"Great. Let's have another drink on it," said Ozzie, holding out his glass.

After Butch left, Ozzie tried to figure it all out again, but soon gave up. He plugged in the television and watched it until he fell asleep in the overstuffed chair.

Late on the night before the game, he pushed his wheelbarrow full of tools to the field. He was sitting on one of the players' benches contemplating all the work he was about to do when, in a flurry of thought, he was struck with an inspiration.

"Move the whole field back five feet?" he asked himself aloud. Then he giggled and danced a little jig.

The following day, Watson's machinists won a close game over the Harbor Freight dockworkers.

That afternoon Herbert Haskell visited Ozzie.

"Well, I see you got a new TV with that money I gave you."

"Sort of," said Ozzie.

"I just stopped by to thank you. Your little effort gave us the edge we needed to beat the dockworkers."

Haskell put two twenties on top of the TV. "Just one more thing, though. I'd like you to go over to the field and put everything back the way it was. We wouldn't want anybody discovering our little deception. Would we?"

"No, sir."

"See you next year, Ozzie."

Ozzie put the twenties in the tin can in the refrigerator. A few hours later, Butch showed up. Ozzie was nervous.

"Close game . . . but we lost." Butch walked over to the television. "I guess we can't blame you, can we?"

Ozzie said nothing.

"I wasn't really sure you were going to move home plate like I asked."

"Loyalty," mumbled Ozzie. "What?"

Ozzie didn't answer.

"You know, I measured the distance home plate was from the backstop before I ever talked to you last week, then I measured it again after today's game." Butch put a pint of whisky on the television. "I'm sorry I doubted you, Ozzie. You moved it just like I told you to. We just played a lousy game."

"Sorry you lost," said Ozzie.

"Got one more favor to ask. No sense anyone discovering what we did. How about slipping over to the field tonight and straightening it out."

"Okay."

"Mum's the word," said Butch and left.

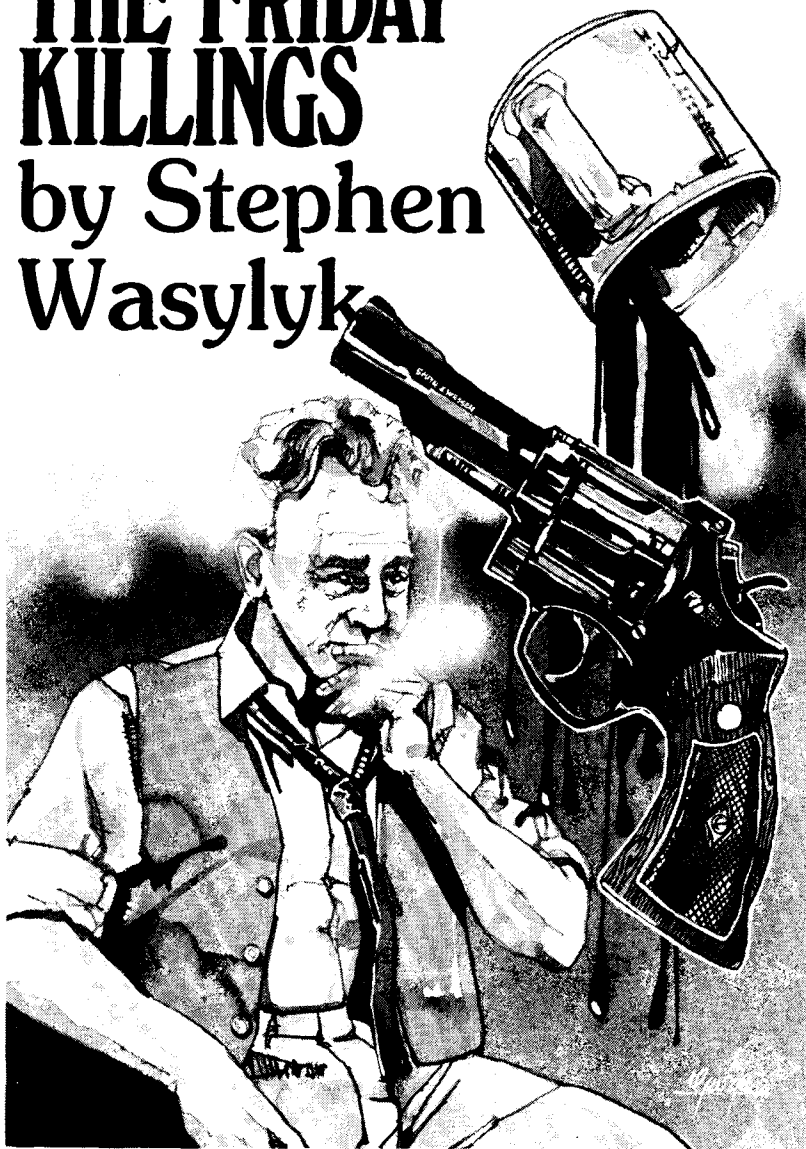
Late that night, Ozzie slipped over to the ballfield and moved the backstop five feet forward to its original position.



FICTION

# THE FRIDAY KILLINGS

by Stephen  
Wasylyk



*Illustration by Arthur George*

This was Thursday. Beyond that, Hoke Beckett was sure of nothing—except that tomorrow was Friday and someone would die.

Three people were already dead with no motive apparent; each shot on a Friday by the same weapon, even though there was absolutely no connection between the people at all: Mabel Jobansky, a sixty-five-year-old housewife answered her door at seven in the morning and died; August Noble, a thirty-five-year-old plumber, remained alone to close his office at the end of the day and was shot; Rand Plymouth, forty-two years old, arrived home late from his successful engineering firm and met death in his driveway.

They had lived in different parts of the county, moved in entirely different circles, and as far as Beckett could determine, didn't even know each other.

Yet the gun was the same. Ballistic tests proved it—which was all that had been proved.

The situation had sent Beckett back to coffee and cigarettes after a year's torturous abstinence, so he swore and smoked and sipped as he drove Spocker and the other county detectives to come up with answers.

When Spocker poked his head around the doorway to Beckett's office, it was as though he was checking to see if it was

safe to enter.

Beckett waved him inside. The heavy sergeant seemed to be losing weight, but then three weeks of double shifts could do that to anyone.

"I went back over the entire neighborhood where this guy Plymouth lived, like you wanted, Hoke. Only thing different is that I found a guy who said there is an old man who walks by every night who might have seen something. Doesn't know who he is or where he lives, so I'm going out there tonight to see if I can find him."

Spocker didn't look at Beckett. His eyes were fixed on something outside the second floor window, anticipating that Beckett would snap at him for not finding the old man already.

"No," said Beckett. "Give me the neighbor's name. I'll talk to him and track down the walker myself."

"I can handle it," said Spocker stiffly.

"I know you can, but you're due to testify in court tomorrow. That defense attorney will do his best to trip you up, so I don't want you dragging in there after being up late. Go home, relax, get a good night's sleep. Maybe we're all working too hard on this thing."

"But tomorrow's Friday. If we don't figure this out tonight—"

"Look. Just because we've had three doesn't mean we'll have four." Beckett hoped he was right. "Go home, Spocker. If you think of something, you know how to get in touch with me."

"If that's the way you want it." Spocker tore a page from his notebook and handed it across the desk. "Here's the guy's name and address. He's seen the old man walking several times, about nine o'clock."

He walked out reluctantly, as though the night off was punishment.

I could have handled that better, thought Beckett. He picked up his coffee cup, stared at it for a moment, then thought, what the hell, it's too late now.

Tolley came in as he put the cup down. "Any progress, Hoke?"

"There's an old guy in Plymouth's neighborhood who goes walking and maybe, just maybe, he might have seen something. I'm going out there later to see if I can find him."

"Damn." The captain walked to the window and stared at the darkening spring sky, his hands in his back pockets. "Wish we could catch a break. Like the connection between those people. Or maybe there is none. Maybe we have a nut who picks a random victim each week and there's no way to anticipate what he'll do next."

"If that's the way it is, we don't have a prayer of stopping him until he makes a mistake. I'd rather stay with our original thought, that the killings are somehow connected. At least if we go down that road, we have a chance. It doesn't cost us anything and we may luck out."

Tolley shrugged. "Play it any way you like. I don't know how, but we have to stop this guy. My stomach hurts all day Friday."

"You're lucky," said Beckett dryly. "Mine hurts all the time."

"That's because of the cigarettes and coffee."

"No," said Beckett. "That's because I don't know what to do next."

"I'll be at home if you need me," said Tolley. "Don't hesitate to call if anything turns up. And I mean *anything*."

The night was soft, the streets in the residential neighborhood winding, the lights doing little to illuminate the darkness under the budding trees.

It wasn't surprising that no one had heard or seen anything when Plymouth had been killed. The houses were widely spaced and surrounded by sound-deadening shrubbery. Even Plymouth's wife, alone in the house, hadn't heard anything, and the only way someone in the dark driveway could be seen was

from the street directly in front of it.

The name Spocker had given Beckett belonged to a young man who lived four houses up the street from the Plymouth home.

"Look, I don't know if it will help or not," he said. "The only reason I mentioned it was because the detective was desperate for information."

"So am I," said Beckett.

The man shrugged. "Okay. I've seen the old guy a half dozen times. I get the impression that he's a heart attack victim and his doctor has given him orders to walk if he wants to stay alive, and walk he does. Head up, shoulders back; hut, two, three, four—just as though he was in the army. I call him the colonel. Doesn't come by every night, at least I don't see him come by, but when I have it's been about nine o'clock, so if he was out there last Friday, he might have seen something."

Beckett settled back to wait in his car. If the walker *had* seen something, why hadn't he come forward? The newspapers had given the killing enough publicity. The man should be capable of putting two and two together.

He found himself lighting a cigarette, even though his mouth was still brassy from the last one. The new wave psy-

chologists would call it a symptom of job-related stress, he thought. And they'd be right.

A few minutes after nine, he caught a glimpse of movement in his rear view mirror and pushed out of the car.

The man coming toward him was marching briskly through the shadows in the street—there were no sidewalks here—listening to a stirring march only he could hear.

His ID held before him, Beckett moved to intercept him under a street light.

The man was elderly, tall, his body square and solid, the planes of his face as rough as an unpolished sculpture. He glanced at the ID and kept moving.

Nerves already raw, Beckett felt a quick flare of anger. "Hold it!"

The man stopped, obviously annoyed. "What is it you want?"

"Did it occur to you I want to talk to you?"

"I have no time for idle chatter."

"Neither do I," snapped Beckett. "Did you walk this way last Friday at about this time?"

"I did. Is it a crime?"

"Didn't you know a man was killed in the driveway of the house down the street?"

"No. I know nothing about it."

"Don't you read the newspapers?"

"Never. They have always

been purveyors of gloom and doom. Now they do it with misspellings and an abuse of the English language."

"Maybe, but you ought to read one once in a while to find out what's going on. You were in the vicinity of the murder, so you might be in a position to help. Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing."

Silencer, as we suspected, thought Beckett. "See anything unusual?"

"Other than the car that almost ran me down, no. It refused to go around me even though there was ample room. I held my ground and it avoided me at the last moment. The fool was driving much too fast."

"Where was this?"

The man gestured at the intersection well beyond the Plymouth home.

Beckett pointed to the Plymouth house. "Did you notice a car parked in front of that house as you went by?"

"Come to think of it, there was a car there."

"So you walked past it and then were almost run down from behind at the intersection. Could *that* car have been the one that almost hit you?"

"I wouldn't swear to it. I didn't turn to see if it was still there after the incident."

"What kind of car was it?"

"Old. Big. From the early seventies. Dark in color."

"Did you notice the license number?"

The man's voice was tolerant. "I don't wear my glasses when I walk."

"How about the driver?"

"I turned my head as he went by to confirm my contention that people who do stupid things are invariably stupid looking. I was right as usual."

Beckett rubbed his eyes, stalling to keep from yelling at the man. "Would you mind telling me what he looked like?"

"Dark hair, thin mustache, heavy eyebrows. As I told you, stupid looking."

Wonderful, thought Beckett. The first really solid lead we've turned up, and that's the best description I can get.

"Let me have your name and address, please."

"Colonel Amos Hollingworth, U.S. Army, Retired; 602 Aspen Lane."

Beckett noted it under the light from the street lamp. "Colonel, I'd appreciate your coming with me and describing the man to our police artist. He may be able to come up with a sketch."

He could have been asking for a three day pass at the wrong time.

"I am due to be in bed in just forty minutes," said the colonel sternly.

"The man you saw might be responsible for the deaths of

three people, all killed on Friday. We think he'll kill again. I don't have to tell you what tomorrow is. Time is very important to us."

"I see." The colonel went to a rigid attention, the flag waving in his voice. "Then I must do my duty, but first I must inform my wife."

"I'll drive you home."

"Certainly not. I must finish my walk. You may follow."

He took off down the street. Beckett climbed into his car and called in orders for Jensen, the police artist, to meet them at the municipal building.

An hour later, Jensen and the colonel were tucked away in a corner, Jensen's eyes already beginning to roll at Beckett pleadingly. The colonel could do that to a man.

His wife wasn't much better. Hovering at his shoulder, the thin, hawklike woman was obviously worried that her husband's routine had been broken, and she was fiercely determined to get this over with as soon as possible, as if she expected him to suffer a massive coronary there in the squad room.

A week, thought Beckett. It took a week to find him because the neighbor didn't think of him and the colonel never read newspapers. If we had the description last Saturday, there was no telling how far we could

have come by now.

He didn't doubt for a moment that the man the colonel had seen was the killer. The entire time they had stood in the street talking, no one else had appeared. Not even a car had gone by.

The colonel didn't know it, but he was a lucky man. He'd missed the killing by no more than a minute. If the man had run down the driveway to the car and seen him there, he just might have died, too. As it was, he almost did, anyway. He said the man had almost run him down.

He looked up to see Spocker entering.

"I thought I told you to take the night off."

"I can't sleep." Spocker nodded toward the colonel. "I see you found the old guy. Any help?"

"Not enough to end it, but enough to keep us going."

"Anything I can do?"

"Sure. Get ready to testify at that trial tomorrow."

"Let me tell you something, Hoke. It doesn't make much difference what I do or don't do. That jury will believe what it wants to believe. If there's nothing I can do to help, I might as well go home and watch television."

He was halfway to the door when Beckett reached for a cigarette, conscious that his hand



was trembling a little with excitement.

"Spocker," he said softly.

Spocker turned, his eyes questioning.

Beckett motioned him into his office. "Sit down."

Beckett slid behind his desk and lighted a cigarette slowly and deliberately, blowing the smoke toward the ceiling.

"Spocker, try to think of a group of people who could be anywhere from twenty-one to sixty-five years old, come from every walk of life, can be male or female, and come together once in their lifetimes, not knowing each other, and never seeing each other again after that one meeting."

Spocker looked uncomfortable. "I don't know what you're driving at."

"Think, Spocker. They meet once, go their separate ways, and never meet as a group again."

The smoke from the cigarette curled slowly upward.

"Damn," said Spocker softly.

"Exactly," said Beckett. "Damn. And if you hadn't said what you did, we would never have thought of it."

"A jury," said Spocker. "That's the connection. They all served on a jury."

"They *could* have served on a jury. I'll call Plymouth's wife. You take the other two."

Spocker was moving before

Beckett reached for his phone.

The voice that answered at the Plymouth home was male. "Rand's brother Larry, lieutenant," it said. "Mrs. Plymouth is sleeping. The doctor has given her a strong sedative."

Plymouth's younger brother had been there a week ago; a not-too-successful attorney whose ability didn't equal his male-model looks and who Beckett had heard was trying to capitalize on that handsomeness by moving into politics, where it could be converted into votes rather than fees. He had hovered solicitously over his sister-in-law, one of those tiny, very feminine women who looked out of place without a man at her side. Evidently he was still hovering.

"Maybe you can help," said Beckett. "Did your brother ever serve on a jury?"

The answer was so long in coming, Beckett almost repeated the question.

"He did. About ten years ago."

"Do you remember the man's name?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. I sat in on the case out of curiosity and will never forget the last day. When the verdict was announced, the defendant, Garvin, threatened to kill everyone connected—" He broke off. "Good Lord, do you think—?"

"We'll look into it," said Beckett.

Spocker entered, smiling for the first time in three weeks. "We've hit the jackpot, Hoke. Not only did she serve on a jury, but Mrs. Jobansky saved a newspaper clipping because she was interviewed after the trial. Her daughter dug it out. The clipping also mentions Noble and Plymouth. The date was September twelfth, ten and a half years ago. The man's name was Curt Garvin. He was sentenced to ten to twelve, which means he could be out now."

"That's it, then," said Beckett. "It looks like Garvin is going after them all. Plymouth's brother said he threatened everyone at the trial. What we need now are the names of the other nine."

He dialed Tolley at home.

"We finally got a break. We have a connection between the people. They served on a jury ten years ago that convicted a guy named Curt Garvin who threatened to kill—"

"Everybody from the judge on down," interrupted Tolley. "Hell, Hoke, I was there, so he included me, too."

"Too bad you didn't remember the names of the jury."

"I never knew them. Who pays attention to those, other than the prosecutor and the defender when they are selecting them from the panel?"

"Garvin did. Where did you fit in?"

"I was a sergeant back then, and the arresting officer. One of them, anyway. My partner was old Harry Reynolds. You never knew him. He retired about eight years ago."

"What made Garvin threaten everybody?"

"He claimed he was innocent and he was being railroaded. I'll tell you about it when I get there."

"Hold it. We need the names of the other nine jurors, and the only place they exist is in the court records. If Garvin is lining up on another one tomorrow, we need those names fast. You'll have to use your clout with the presiding judge to get someone down here at this time of night to dig them out."

"Leave it to me."

Escorted by a uniformed man, the colonel and his wife were leaving. Jensen was headed toward Beckett's door, his pad under his arm.

He held up the sketch. "This is as far as I can go, Hoke."

The face was deeply carved, heavy with angular shadows, the brows shaggy, the eyes deep-set.

"Ugly, isn't he?" asked Jensen.

"Why do I get the feeling I've seen that face before?"

"Funny," said Jensen. "I feel the same way."

"We'll need the picture in Garvin's package to compare it with." Beckett turned to Spocker. "Send someone down to the old records room to dig it out."

"You need me any more, Hoke?" asked Jensen. "If not, I'm heading for the nearest bar. The colonel wore me out."

"Have one for me," said Beckett.

Alone in his office, he poured a cup of coffee and stood at the window. The town had quieted, the traffic in the streets was sparse.

Courtroom threats were nothing new, but they were seldom carried out. Ten years should have been enough to cool Garvin off, but from the way it was shaping up, it had done nothing but fix the hate deeper.

He had threatened everyone from the judge on down, Tolley had said. That would make the judge, the jury, the prosecuting attorney, and Tolley and his partner. Sixteen people. How could a man set out to deliberately kill sixteen people, no matter what the provocation, real or imagined? Yet three of them were dead already.

Beckett finished his coffee and glanced at his watch. The hands were pushing midnight, yet he didn't feel as tired as he had that afternoon. Maybe he'd been rejuvenated because they

were finally getting somewhere.

He propped up Jensen's sketch and stood looking at it. How good were the colonel's eyes without his glasses? He'd had only a glimpse of the man, and at night. Not much to take before a jury.

He reached for a cigarette, wishing Tolley would get here and they would get this thing wound up. Three weeks was a long time for this kind of pressure.

Tolley came in, moving fast, beckoning them all into Beckett's office. "The judge is sending a man to get the records. You stay with him, Spocker. Did you dig out Garvin's package yet?"

"O'Malley is looking for it now," said Spocker.

Tolley's eye caught Jensen's sketch. "What's that?"

Beckett explained about the colonel.

Tolley shook his head. "If that's the killer, it's not Garvin. He couldn't have changed that much in ten years."

They stared at him.

"Where does that leave us now?" asked Spocker.

"I thought the colonel was too good to be true," said Beckett slowly. "We go with Garvin. He's the only one with a motive and we have no choice. Get on the phone to the state prison. See what they can tell you."

O'Malley came in with a dog-eared folder. "I finally found it."

Beckett took the package and flipped it open. The face that stared up at him from the photo was nothing like Jensen's sketch.

"You don't have to read that," said Tolley. "I can tell you all about Garvin. He'd been in and out of trouble since he was a kid, maybe because his father was always away. Eventually, he graduated into armed robbery. We picked him up once or twice, but couldn't make the charges stick. The last time we did. He held up a liquor store. The clerk picked him out of the mug book and then out of a lineup. When we searched his apartment, we found a .38 and eight hundred dollars in a coffee can, which was the amount taken from the store. Garvin claimed they had been planted, which was ridiculous. I certainly didn't do it and I know Harry Reynolds wouldn't have. Anyway, at the time he was sentenced, he jumped to his feet and swore that he would kill everyone connected with the trial. I'd heard that song before, so I let it go in one ear and out the other."

"Sixteen people," said Beckett.

"Not that many now. Judge Clark died several years ago and Harry Reynolds passed away last year. Lonergan, the

assistant county attorney at the time, is now a state senator and out of town. As for the jury, there's no telling how many of them are still around."

"You're around," said Beckett.

"Yeah, but he isn't dumb enough to try for me when all the others are much easier to get at. Those are the ones to worry about."

Nine of them, thought Beckett, and Garvin could have scheduled any one of them for death the following day.

The hands of the clock passed midnight and started their slow slide toward dawn. The streets outside Beckett's window became completely deserted, only an occasional police car to be seen.

The state prison official Spocker had spoken to said that Garvin had been released six weeks ago, and since he'd served his time, he had no further record on him. No parole officer to report to, no address. No one was interested in him now except Spocker and a newsman who had called a month ago.

The search for the jurors' names had taken much too long. The people responsible hadn't been particularly careful, which meant a great deal of digging through the records deep in the bowels of the municipal build-

ing. Furious at the delay, Beckett's scathing denunciation of the intelligence and efficiency of the court bureaucracy caused several pieces of loose plaster to fall and the mice within the walls to scurry for cover.

Spocker finally appeared about four in the morning with a list.

Mrs. Jobansky was on it. So were Noble and Plymouth. Beckett's men went to work checking out the other names, shattering the sleep of nine families so that it was after five before they knew where they stood.

Of the nine, two had since died and three had moved away, leaving four possible victims if their theory was correct.

"One woman and three men," said Beckett. "Any of them could be Garvin's next, which gives us a chance to pick him up."

"You want to use them as bait?" asked Tolley.

"We can talk it over with them. If they don't want to go along, fine. That's their right. We'll still give them protection."

"Suppose they agree. How do you want to handle it?"

"Have someone in plain clothes stay with them wherever they go, and back them up with a car in the vicinity."

Tolley shook his head. "You can try, Hoke, but if I know people, they're not going to buy it."

Tolley was wrong. The first one, a grandmotherly type named Clayton whom Beckett found sipping coffee because she had been unable to go back to sleep after the phone call, offered him a cup and listened intently to what he had to say.

"I'm a little too old to worry about some crackpot threatening to kill me," she said when he had finished. "If you want me to help catch him, I'm ready. What do I do?"

"Just go about your daily routine. The only difference will be that you will have a young lady with you. She'll be armed and in constant radio contact with a car in the vicinity. You can pretend she's your granddaughter."

Mrs. Clayton laughed. "Friday's my shopping day. I always did need someone to help with the packages."

The second was a machinist named Dunn whom Beckett caught as he came down to breakfast. Middle-aged and stocky, Dunn thrust out his chin. "What's he going to do, shoot me while I'm at work?"

"No. He'll wait until you're alone, and he'll know when you're alone because he will have been watching you."

"Then I'll change my routine."

"We don't want you to do that. The idea is not only to pro-

teet you but to pick him up."

"I'm to be the bait, is that it?"

"We'll have a man with you all the time, but you don't have to go along with it."

"What are the odds that I'm the guy he wants next?"

"One in four."

"I wish I could get odds like that in the state lottery, but I'm dumb enough to take the chance. Get your man in here. We can have breakfast together."

Spocker had contacted the other two, a young pressman named Clemens who worked for the town newspaper and a middle-aged businessman named Devlin who ran a stationery store. "They've agreed, Hoke," he said when he called in.

Beckett stubbed out a cigarette in his overflowing ashtray and glanced at his watch. Just past seven thirty. It was going to be a long day.

The waiting this Friday was worse than it had been last week, even though then they hadn't the faintest idea of what might happen and when, and now they knew what they were waiting for.

By noon the cigarettes had given Beckett a scratchy throat, the coffee had roiled his stomach, and Tolley was pacing his office.

Beckett spent a great deal of time at his window, feeling

helpless and looking at the heavy Friday traffic, thinking that Garvin wouldn't really attempt anything during the day with so many people around. He'd do what he had done before. Wait until everything had quieted down and he could get his victim alone.

It seemed to be the wrong season for the whole thing. Spring was a time of rebirth and renewal, not waiting for death. Somehow that belonged to the cold days of winter.

Errant thoughts didn't help the hours pass any more quickly. They still had to be endured, second by second, minute by minute, the hands on his watch seeming barely to move as the reports from the four cars filtered in periodically, all negative.

The shadows of afternoon grew longer with an agonizing, almost imperceptible slowness until finally they touched and blended and became one. Twilight dimmed shapes. A high-flying jet flashed in the last rays of the sun and suddenly it was dark and Mrs. Clayton and Dunn were in their homes, safe for the time being. But it was bowling night for Clemens and Devlin was still in his store, to be there until after nine. They were still vulnerable.

Beckett stationed another car to the rear of Devlin's store and moved one to cover his home,



a house much like Plymouth's, surrounded by shrubbery and somewhat isolated.

A third would prowls the parking lot of Clemens' bowling alley before he arrived and remain there until he left, while a fourth would find a parking spot in front of the modest twin where he lived long before he arrived home.

Time was compressing, the hours when something might happen and could happen becoming fewer.

Nine o'clock came and went, Devlin closing his store and driving home without incident. He was now safely in the house.

It was after ten before Clemens finished bowling. Forty-five minutes later, he was in his home.

Tolley sat on Beckett's windowsill listening to the reports come in. "One more hour and it will be the first Friday when somebody didn't get killed."

Preventing the killing wasn't the end of it, thought Beckett, rolling his head in an effort to relieve the tension that had crept down between his shoulder blades. Garvin was still out there.

"I hope we haven't done something wrong," he said slowly. "If we had this figured right, Garvin should have made his move." He indicated the sketch. "Maybe we're looking for the wrong man."

"Forget that thing," said Tolley. "Either Jensen is losing his touch or the colonel didn't know what he was looking at. That doesn't even look like a real face. It looks like something the kids wear on Halloween night."

"Maybe Garvin wore a mask."

"Maybe. But no one has spotted anything like that."

"Damn," said Beckett. "Four people. The only ones available. Unless—" He looked at Tolley. "Are you sure Lonergan is out of town?"

"I talked to him a week ago. He said he wouldn't be back until the legislature adjourned."

"Let's check anyway. You know his home phone."

Tolley sighed, drew the phone toward him, and dialed. The expression on his face changed from a weary boredom to incredulity and then to worry.

"Where is he?" asked Beckett when Tolley dropped the receiver into place.

"He and his wife are at a political fund-raiser at the hotel. He made a special trip."

Beckett was moving before Tolley finished speaking. "Get a car over there and don't let him leave."

**B**eckett was driving Lonergan's Cadillac, wearing Lonergan's hat and light topcoat. Well behind, two police cars followed

with Lonergan and his wife.

The Lonergan home was outside of town, a white Colonial at the end of a long driveway, a feeble yellow light over the entrance only partially illuminating the gravel apron before the front door, fading long before it reached the low hedge that separated the apron from the broad lawn.

Beckett parked and sat for a moment, listening and hearing only the usual night sounds. He drew his .38, held it close to his body, and slid out of the car. A sudden movement beyond the hedge along the driveway, a shadow darker than the rest, a blackness where there shouldn't have been blackness, made him throw himself to one side as a light flashed at him out of the night and a slug poned against the car where he had been.

"*Hold it! Police!*" yelled Beckett.

The light stabbed at him again.

Beckett fired at the flash, feet digging and slipping as he dived for the shelter of the hedge.

The cars following him skidded to a halt, doors opening and uniformed men scrambling for cover behind the vehicles.

Beckett's eyes strained against the darkness until a powerful spotlight on one of the cars swept across the area and settled on a sprawled figure on the lawn.

Beckett approached it cautiously.

The chest of the black turtle-neck glistened with blood, the face above it matching Jensen's sketch. Beckett reached for a pulse, found one, and yelled, "Get an ambulance!"

He knew now why the craggy face had seemed familiar to Jensen and why Tolley had suggested it looked like a mask.

It *was* a mask, one of those molded rubber caricatures with exaggerated features that delighted children and were a boon to holdup men, and that had stared at Beckett with sightless eyes from the window of the novelty store in town. He couldn't blame the colonel for mistaking it for a real face in the gloom.

Beckett peeled it off.

"He'll live," Beckett told Tolley in the hospital waiting room. "We have the gun to tie him to the three killings and the colonel's testimony to back it up."

"He should have quit while he was ahead," said Tolley.

Beckett shook his head. "He couldn't stop with Plymouth. It would have looked odd if no attempt was made on the others. Sooner or later, we'd have been wondering why Plymouth was the last to die, especially if his plan to marry the widow went through. The whole thing was a cover-up for the killing of his

brother. He'd been at the trial and knew about Garvin's threat. He checked to see if Garvin had been released by pretending to be a reporter. When he found out that he had, it gave him a made-to-order suspect he'd tell us about when he was ready, but we made the connection too soon."

"So he figured we'd have men on the other jurors and went for Lonergan."

"Not exactly. Mrs. Jobanksy, Noble, and Plymouth were in the newspaper story. He had no idea of who the others were. Not that it mattered. He did know Lonergan and knew he'd be at the fund-raiser, which was more than we did."

"All because he wanted his brother's wife."

"More than that, his brother's money. Turns out that Plymouth was worth well over a million. He wanted that to finance his political ambitions."

"The county prosecutor will want this one for himself. I hear he's after Lonergan's job, and he can get a lot of newspaper coverage during the trial by throwing around words like lust and greed."

"That's his problem. I've had enough of politicians and would-be politicians for one night." Beckett rolled his head again. The tension hadn't eased a bit. "They've given me one helluva headache." He cocked an eyebrow at Tolley. "Like the rest of the country."

Tolley grinned. "Get out of here. Go home to bed."

As he passed through the doors of the hospital, Beckett automatically reached for a cigarette, stared at the pack for a moment, then tossed it into a nearby trash receptacle.

Giving up coffee again could wait for a few more days. You could expect only so much sacrifice from any man.

# OFF THE RECORD

## THE FUNNY PAPER DETECTIVES OF THE THIRTIES

by Ron Goulart



**T**he 1930's was a good decade for mystery fans. You could find detectives in just about every popular medium, from movies and radio to books and pulp magazines. And you also encountered them, unlike today, in great quantities in the comic sections of newspapers. Six days a week, and often in color on Sunday as well, there were tough cops, government agents, Scotland Yard 'tects, reporters who dabbled in detection and even Sherlock Holmes himself.

The most successful detective strip to come along in the thirties was *Dick Tracy*. The strip began in 1931, the same year Al Capone was tried for income tax evasion, and was the work of a thirty-year-old cartoonist

named Chester Gould. Living in the Chicago area, Gould had sources of inspiration close at hand. "Chicago in 1931 was being shot up by gangsters," Gould once recalled, "and I decided to invent a comic strip character who would always get the best of the assorted hoodlums and mobsters." What was needed was a detective who "could hunt these fellows up and shoot 'em down." Besides being tough and impatient, although not much of a civil libertarian, Dick Tracy was unreachably honest. An honest cop was much needed in places like Chicago and New York City, to name but two places with less than spotless police departments at the time. Gould's new strip was soon a success in

these markets, as well as in other urban areas. Heroes who were impatient with red tape, particularly nice guy vigilantes like Tracy, were extremely popular in the Depression years. Gould's plainclothesman rose to success in the same years in which Clark Gable, Jimmy Cagney, and John Dillinger became national celebrities.

"Gunplay is a part of the strip, and was from the very beginning. That is natural," Gould once explained. "The law is always armed. Back in 1931 no cartoon had ever shown a detective character fighting it out face to face with crooks via the hot lead route. This detail brought certain expressions of misgivings. . . . However, within two years the sentiment had faded to the point where six other strips of a similar pattern were on the market." While gunplay had something to do with the popularity of the Tracy strip, it was the increasingly violent and bizarre methods of dispatching crooks, and cops, that attracted readers and news magazines. As the strip progressed, undercover agents were frozen alive in refrigerator trucks, smuggled aliens were sunk in the ocean with their own chains as anchors, rival crooks were doused with clean-

ing fluid and set afire, midget crooks were roasted in steam baths. There were also shootings, floggings, throttlings, bludgeonings, and an occasional amputation. Gould was ingenious, too, in coming up with ways almost to kill Tracy himself. Villains tried dynamite on the detective, decompression chambers, sulphur fumes, exploding furnaces. They even dipped him in paraffin once.

"I try to keep the detective deductions angle the main theme of underlying interest," Gould maintained. "Pursuit, deduction and action are the ingredients that I stress." Although he was a pioneer in the police procedural detective strip, it was the crooks and villains and not the authentic means used to track them down that helped put *Dick Tracy* at the top of the popularity polls from the middle 1930's on. After a few years of relatively conventional gangsters and hoodlums, such as Larceny Lu, Stogie Viller, and Cut Famon, Chester Gould started experimenting with more flamboyant and exotic, not to mention uglier, criminals: the Blank, the Mole, B. B. Eyes, Little Face Finny, Flat-top, the Brow, Pruneface, and so on.

The success of *Dick Tracy* didn't go unnoticed. Other feature syndicates brought forth imitations. *Dan Dunn* by Norman Marsh began in 1933. Dan possessed a profile that, except for a squarer chin, was almost identical to Tracy's. His hat was a little floppier, but that may have been because Marsh couldn't draw anywhere near as well as Gould. Also known as Secret Operative 48, Dan Dunn didn't limit himself to urban crimes. While he might track down a bank robbing gang led by Ma Zinger, he was equally at home battling villainous turbaned masterminds. He matched wits also with Spider Slick, "the brains of a monstrous gang"; Eviloff, a hooded archcriminal who owned his own island, which was named after himself; and a sinister Oriental called Wu Fang. The writing on the strip mixed the hardboiled with the melodramatic. The drawing was godawful.

Always aware of successful trends, William Randolph Hearst's King Features Syndicate was anxious to have some crime and detective strips of their own. To that end they went after real detective story writers like Dashiell Hammett. Hammett agreed to go to work

for Hearst, signing a contract that guaranteed him five hundred dollars per week. What Hammett came up with was *Secret Agent X-9*. The young artist given the job of drawing X-9 was Alex Raymond, best remembered today for *Flash Gordon* and *Rip Kirby*. Not having Hammett's stature, he was paid something in the neighborhood of twenty dollars a week. (No, that's not a misprint.)

Hammett biographer William F. Nolan has said, "Hammett combined the Op and Sam Spade in the character of X-9. He was cool, efficient, quick with a gun or a wisecrack and, like the Op, was a man without a name." Not only that, but during the first weeks of the feature it was difficult to tell who X-9 was a secret agent for. Although he talks and acts like a pulp private eye when he is on a case, X-9 lives in a fashionable apartment and has a Filipino valet. When we first meet X-9, he is lounging in his apartment wearing a silk smoking jacket. The initial continuity involves him in protecting a millionaire. There are lurking hoods, an unfaithful wife, a crooked lawyer, crooked servants, and a virginal blonde niece. The police don't seem to have

any idea of exactly what kind of secret agent our hero is, either. Eventually, after Hammett had left the strip, it was revealed that X-9 was with the FBI.

By 1935, Hammett was no longer associated with the strip. According to a contemporary magazine account, he was fired "when he lagged behind schedule with ideas that lacked the power of his printed work." Leslie Charteris followed Hammett as writer, and when he left, the syndicate attached a penname, Robert Storm, and farmed out the script assignments. Rumors have persisted for years that Hammett never actually wrote the strip at all, but simply lent his name to it and had an old pulp colleague, a fellow named James Moynahan, do the actual writing. I've never been able to confirm this, but it would help to explain why X-9 never had the spark of Hammett's other work. The strip, under the name *Secret Agent Corrigan*, continues to this day. Current artist-writer is George Evans.

For readers who wanted to get even closer to real life there was a strip called *War on Crime*. It dealt with true, or nearly true, crime and was based on FBI files. An early blurb de-

scribed the feature as offering "True Stories of G-Men Activities, Based on Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—Modified in the Public Interest." The scripts were by Rex Collier, a Washington *Star* reporter as well as a friend and confidante of J. Edgar Hoover. Those modifications mentioned above were made by an FBI agent assigned by Hoover to go over each continuity.

The strip began running in the spring of 1936 and folded in 1938. For most of the run, the artist was the gifted and unduly forgotten Kemp Starrett. While the stories dealt with some of the more colorful and violent of the Depression era public enemies—Dillinger, Alvin Karpis, Pretty Boy Floyd, Ma Barker—much of the copy was bland. The violence was toned down, and there was never any mention of mistakes FBI agents might have been guilty of in real life. According to Collier, though, the real reason for *War on Crime's* demise was simple. "We ran out of public enemies," he told an interviewer at the time.

By now you've no doubt noted that most of the funny paper detective characters of the decade went in more for brawling and gunplay than they did for



the formal pursuit of clues. There were, however, some exceptions. In the early 1930's Sherlock Holmes, a cerebral sleuth if there ever was one, had a brief fling as the star of a daily newspaper strip. Even though the continuities were fairly faithful adaptations of Conan Doyle stories, the strip didn't thrive.

In 1938 a detective noted for his patient gathering of clues, as well as for his aphorisms, came to the comic sections. *Charlie Chan* was by the late Alfred Andriola and enjoyed a five year run, daily and Sunday. Chan had been around since 1925, when Earl Derr Biggers sold *The House Without a Key* as a serial to the *Saturday Evening Post*. Altogether Biggers turned out six Chan novels before he died in 1933. They are unexceptional, and had it not been for Warner Oland, Charlie Chan would never have become the valuable property he did. Oland, a Swedish actor who had played Fu Manchu and Al Jolson's father on the screen, was the fourth actor to play Chan on the screen. Oland did his first Charlie Chan film in 1931, and he brought the character to life. Andriola based his comic strip version of the Chinese detective

on the Oland characterization. Although Warner Oland died the same year the first strips appeared, the cartoonist continued to think of him as the definitive Charlie.

While Andriola had read the Biggers novels, he didn't adapt any of them to comic strip form. His Charlie was the movie Charlie. He also took the Number One Son character from the 20th Century-Fox films, drawing him in the early strips to resemble Key Luke. The rest of the characters were his own invention. Andriola soon found that "an elderly, philosophical Oriental detective was not ideal for a story strip. . . . A comic strip needs action." To this end he introduced, early in 1939, a second detective. This was Kirk Barrow, "a vigorous, attractive American, who can speak softly or forcefully, but still carry a big punch." From then on, the daily strip co-starred Barrow. Son Lee, looking less and less like Key Luke, appeared chiefly in the Sunday page thereafter. Unlike many of the continuity strips of the time, Andriola's had a separate story line for the daily and Sunday sequences. He soon learned you couldn't plot a daily like a mystery novel or a detective movie. In a newspaper feature, by the time Chan

gathered all the suspects together for that final explanation of the case, ten or twelve weeks had gone by. Unless the reader were keeping a scrapbook, he wasn't likely to remember who'd taken a walk around the deck back in April. Therefore, Andriola kept the clues down to a minimum and emphasized action and simple suspense. With the Sunday page he was able to do a little more in the way of plotting. During the last years of the strip he took to telling Sunday stories that ran only two to four weeks. Sometimes these were not much more puzzling than the *Minute Mysteries* sort of thing, yet these *Charlie Chan* Sunday tales come closer to being formal detective stories than almost anything else in the comics at the time.

There were many other detectives to be found in the comic sections of the thirties. From the works of Edgar Wallace came *Inspector Wade of Scotland Yard*, and from the works of Sax Rohmer came *Fu Manchu*, which starred one of the all-time great bumbling detectives, Nayland Smith. Reporters who solved mysteries were to be found in *Jim Hardy* by Dick Moores and in *Jane Arden*. The police were represented by *Radio Patrol*, *Detective Riley*, and *King of the Royal Mounted*. For FBI buffs there was *The G-Man*! Some of them survived into the forties, some didn't. But there was never again a decade when there was so much mystery, crime, and detection to be found in the funnies.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

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ARTHUR UPFIELD

Any travel agent could probably confirm my suspicion that Australia is more popular with Americans now than at any other time in recent history. *The Thorn Birds* (in both its book and TV-movie versions) focused our eyes on that great continent, as have a number of recent offerings from a respectable Australian film industry there. No small part of the appeal those movies have had is the exotic quality of their settings, for Australia is a huge land mass with a wide variety of flora and fauna, geography and scenery. It is a land of mystery, sparsely populated and rugged in terrain, and its history of settlement and civilization has parallels to our own Wild West.

Australia's mystery is certainly no mean part of the attraction Arthur Upfield's books have had for American readers because Australia is where Upfield chose to set his thirty-three mystery novels, twenty-nine of which feature his series detective, Napoleon Bonaparte. Each book has a different locale in Australia, but aside from geography—graphic descriptions of the "bush," overrun with hares and "roos"—Upfield also offers readers insightful views of the culture and sociology of Australia during the years he was writing his novels, from 1929 to 1966.

"Bony"—the name our detective gives out to his friends—is clearly burdened with an unlikely name, but he is also

blessed with an ego so healthy it often borders on arrogance. A half-caste, he attributes his love of the bush, his prowess as a tracker and wilderness survivor, and his ability to communicate with the native tribes to his aboriginal mother. Bony's induction in his youth into a powerful tribe, and the ritual marks scored on his back, also give him status. The various reactions this detective inspector receives when he makes his identity known (he's often undercover for much of a novel) tell a great deal about relations between the races in Australia, where the white homesteaders often own great chunks of territory for raising livestock, and where tribes of aborigines still roam, living the way their ancestors did, side by side with the ranchers. It is, according to these books, usually a very peaceable arrangement.

Upfield was born in England in 1888 and was sent to Australia by his father in 1911. Although he did return to England, only to then ship back to Australia, he ended up spending twenty years roaming that continent, working as an itinerant trapper or miner or sometimes even cook. Upfield gave the same skills and occupations to his hero detective, and Bony was likely to be called in as a lone investigator long after the regular police forces had come

up empty-handed. He would then disguise himself as a horse-trainer or a drifter, and taking his time, he would work alone, inevitably solving the crime.

Bony is an exceptional detective. His dark brown face and startling blue eyes often show no emotion, although most people—especially women—find him soft-spoken, gentle, almost courtly. He's married to a half-caste woman whom he loves deeply, and he's inordinately proud of their three grown sons. He portrays himself as a maverick in the police force, a burr in the side of his superiors; and yet he is always called on to solve the insoluble. He holds an M.A. from Brisbane University, and his rank in the police force is unusually high for someone of mixed blood. A few of his suspects have the perspicacity to see Bony as a formidable man; they point to his personal achievements and infer his inner strengths and high intelligence. Bony, however, needs no such reassurances from anyone else; he knows he's superior.

Australia and its many diverse faces is not just the background for these novels. The land and its hardships, customs, and even superstitions shape the tenor and often the motives of the crimes Bony must unravel. The isolation and loneliness of the whites on out-

lying posts, the rigors of a land that offers little comfort and only wild beauty, the extremities of both poverty and wealth, are all themes in the crimes Bony investigates. The author was obviously mesmerized by Australia, especially the bush, and there's poetry in his descriptions of the shimmering mirages, or the regality of big birds on the wing, or the solitary lunch of "dampier bread and hard-boiled duck eggs" taken from a swag (a backpack or bedroll) and consumed in the shade of a single desert tree.

The Bony novels were published in hardcover in the United States as part of the Doubleday Crime Club series, and I was able to locate a number of those editions in the public library. Four are also available in Scribner paperbacks: *Death of a Lake*, *Death of a Swagman*, *The Devil's Steps*, and *Murder Down Under*. I suggest you start your reading

with either of the first two. *Death of a Lake* gives us Bony as an itinerant horse trainer who comes to an outpost near Lake Otway, where, months earlier, a young man apparently drowned. Now the sun is sucking the life out of the lake; soon it will be dried up entirely; the men and women at the camp are nervously awaiting the discovery of the drowned man's skeleton. *Death of a Swagman* finds Bony disguised as a swagman (a wandering hired hand) himself, and engineering his own arrest by the local constable to add authenticity to his cover. Another murder and the kidnapping of a winsome little girl add action to a suspenseful tale of detection. In this novel, as in many of the Bony mysteries, the clue to the murderer's identity lies in an offbeat and quirky psyche. Upfield knew that terrain almost as well as he did his beloved Australia.

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### MYSTERY REVIEWS

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Lesley Egan, author of literally dozens of mystery novels, shows the sure hand of a pro in her latest book. *Little Boy Lost* (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95, 179 pp.) presents the engaging Los Angeles attorney Jesse Falkenstein with an almost impossible challenge: to determine if a young man—who's just received an open-hearted welcome from the rich woman he claims is his mother—is actually the same boy who was kidnapped twenty years earlier. The lonely old woman has accepted the stranger as her son; but Jesse's client, the niece who's been abruptly disinherited, has grave doubts. For a time Jesse wonders if he shouldn't let

sleeping dogs lie, but a murder dramatically changes the picture—and makes the search for the truth a matter of life or death.

David Dvorkin's **Time for Sherlock Holmes** will have enormous appeal for anyone who considers the great detective immortal. Why? Because in this latest addition to the collection of tales authored by "John Watson, M.D.," Holmes is immortal, a surprising side-effect his homemade mead (made from the honey of his own bees, raised in his retirement) has on humans. You'll also be pleased to hear that Holmes shares his home brew with Watson, his brother Mycroft, the ever-faithful Mrs. Hudson, and the latest of Watson's pretty young wives. The pursuit of the dastardly Moriarty continues here, with Moriarty using a stolen time machine that was the prototype for the one fictionalized by H. G. Wells. The adventure whisks our heroes hundreds of years into the future, and distances even greater—all the way to Mars, in fact—so understand that this is as much science fiction as it is mystery. Anyway, it's a fun trip for readers who welcome any new additions to the legend, whether penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—or patently by someone else. (Dodd, Mead, \$14.95, 224 pp.)

Margaret Yorke's **Find Me a Villain** (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95, 185 pp.) is an engrossing peek into the secret corners of several lives. At the novel's heart is middle-aged Nina Crowther; this is the compelling story of her search for a new life after her husband surprises her with a plea for a divorce. To escape painful memories and the suffocating attentions of her two well-meaning, adult daughters, Nina accepts a house-sitting job on a luxurious country estate in rural England. Her aching loneliness is only part of her life at "the Hall," though, for in some inexplicable way, Nina seems to have acted as a catalyst in the community. She receives disturbing anonymous phone calls late at night; there is a spate of brutal murders of young women from the neighborhood; and finally, several long-buried skeletons are discovered in her neighbors' closets, figuratively speaking. Yorke powerfully records the small details of daily life so familiar to us all (even if these are details of life in a small British village), while at the same time she manages to brush the portrait with real menace and old fashioned suspense. She has a discerning, unsentimental eye, which in no way diminishes the strong humanity she lends to her everyday characters, especially Nina. This is a fine mystery, and a book one can actually *care* about.

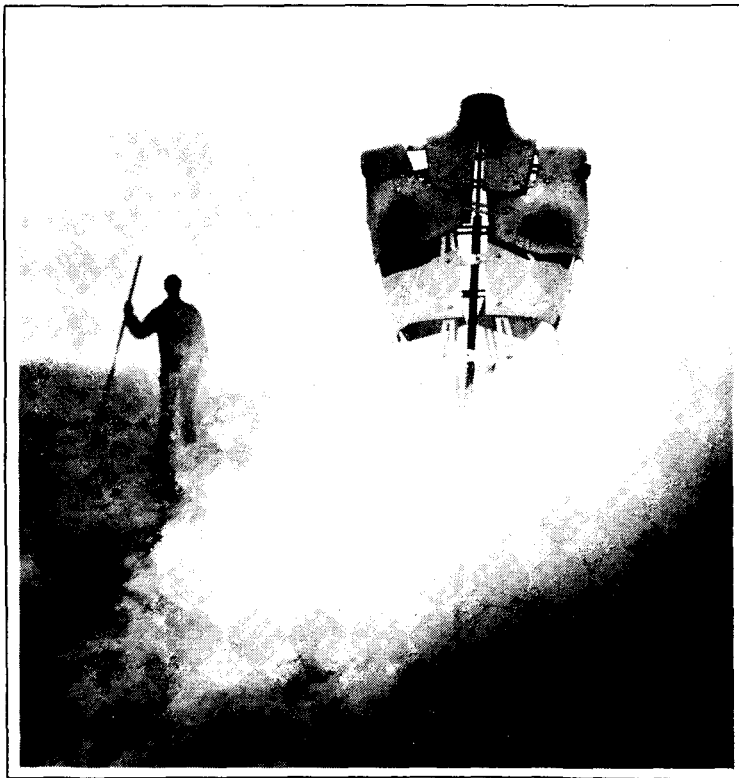
Fans of British police procedurals are probably already familiar with Catherine Aird's novels featuring Detective Inspector C. D.

Sloan. The latest in paperback, **Murder in the Quadrangle**, offers the added pleasure of an academic setting. While the students at the University of Calleshire carry out a sit-in in the administration building, Sloan and his bumbling young constable try to make sense of a series of possibly unrelated events: the theft of a science student's thesis, the sabotage of a professor's lab experiment with white mice, the stabbing of a quiet student in the quad. But there's even more: the faculty librarian has his head bashed in by a nude "streaker," and a letter is stolen—a letter that would apparently, once and for all, verify for historians the identity of Jane Austen's lover. Aird's book was initially published in 1978, and the student idiom already seems dated, while the solution—the identity of the perpetrator and his motives for the dastardly deeds—stretches this reader's credibility. Sloan, though, is his usual engaging self, and much of the university background (the deans' dialogues, for instance, and the competition between town and gown) is amusing. (Bantam Books, \$2.25, 164 pp.)

Readers in search of well-written police procedurals should seek out **The Papers of Tony Veitch**. It is William McIlvanney's second book to star Glasgow detective Jack Laidlaw (whose name was the title of the first book in the series). A colleague describes Laidlaw as "about as easy to explore as the Louisiana Purchase," and readers will agree that this complex novel is not much easier, either. True to form, Laidlaw ignores the advice of his friends and—regardless of the consequences—sets out to learn who poisoned an old-timer and wino. He annoys a powerful businessman, harasses a titled young "lady" of dubious reputation, and, finally, lands himself in the middle of a Glaswegian gang war. McIlvanney is a strong writer with an eye and ear for the urban Scottish scene. His plot is multi-leveled, his characters quite credible, and his prose style nothing so much as a cross between those of Robert Burns and Robert Parker. This novel is superior to many of its kind, and Laidlaw fans will hope, as I do, that this is just the beginning of a long and satisfying series. (Pantheon Books, \$12.95, 254 pp.)



# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

Trouble in the family? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

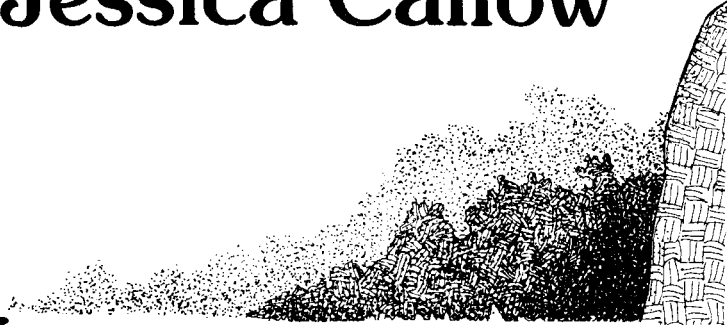
The winning entry for the October Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.



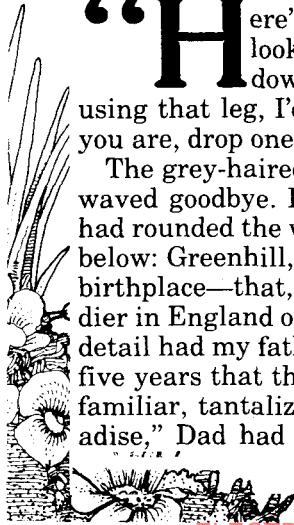
FICTION

# THE BLACK PEARL

by Jessica Callow



**“H**ere’s your best road in, mate. It’ll give you your first look at Greenhill from the top, and easy bike riding down to the Black Boar. Judging by the way you’re using that leg, I’d say you’ll be back in the air right soon. When you are, drop one of your best on that Hitler chap for me.”



The grey-haired trucker who had given me and my bicycle a lift waved goodbye. Five minutes later, along the sandy side road, I had rounded the wooded hill, to come upon the breathtaking scene below: Greenhill, the remote English village that was my father’s birthplace—that, I, Robert Granger, a war-wounded Canadian soldier in England on sick leave, was seeing for the first time. In such detail had my father described it for at least twenty of my twenty-five years that the sight of it was like a recurring dream, at once familiar, tantalizingly vague. “Peaceful, lovely place. Little Paradise.” Dad had said of it, his grey eyes awash with hot tears

*Illustration by Kurt Wallace*

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whenever he spoke of it, this home to which he could not return. For from Greenhill he had fled, accused of murder, a third of a lifetime ago.

"On the hillside, to the north above the town, where the beech-woods begin, is an old oak," my dad had said. "The woods cluster close behind it. There's a blackberry patch, a tangle of wild rose and honeysuckle vine. It's under that old oak that you must sit, son," he'd told me. "From there you can see the Burfords' place off to your right, but a stone's throw away. Closer in, towards the town, almost at the foot of the slope, is where Higgins and Florence Burford lived. Perhaps letting your mind roam, and knowing me, you can come to some resolving of how it was. If only I could have my name cleared, for my parents' sake before they die, for that I'd be eternally grateful. And there's Ruth, my sister, she's had to live with my shame. And now there's you. Yes, under that old oak was

where it all happened, where I killed a man. So they said. I'll never believe it. Much as I loathed Higgins for what he did to Florence, I'd no murder in my heart. I'd made up my mind to leave Greenhill and make a fresh start. And yet there he was beside me, dead, Bullard Higgins, the man who seduced Florence Burford, the girl I was to marry. And there was my revolver, the one bullet fired from it in Higgins' head."

After twenty-five years! My heart sank. How naive we had been, my dad and I. The distance had made it easy to dream that some miracle could happen; that our own desperate urge for truth should, in some way, serve to clarify things. There under the old oak I sat, a fourth generation Robert Thatcher but with no claim to that name, for my father, following his flight to Canada, had taken the family name of the woman he married, Susan Granger, daughter of a Canadian wheat farmer on the prairie of Saskatchewan. A clean breast of it he had made to them, when he and my mother had found themselves in love, and the marriage was a truly happy one, his worth to them well proved in years on the farm.

Somewhere down below where I now sat, in close proximity to the park-like square in the center of town that was the village green, in the shade of sycamore and chestnut trees, were my grandfather, Robert Thatcher; his wife Lydia, my grandmother; and my Aunt Ruth. The Thatchers had for decades been hosts of the Black Boar Inn, perhaps were still? Or gone from the scene. But the Thatcher men are proud of their Nordic look. In Greenhill a Thatcher is what I'd be taken for, so like my dad I am.

I let my eyes and mind revel in the peaceful view. There was the church spire, silvered in the gleam of the August afternoon sun, the grey, turreted tower partly hidden by full-leaved sycamores. From treelined streets came soft sounds of unhurried living: children's laughter, the tinkle of a bicycle bell, a pigeon cooing. The houses, mostly squat cottages, each carried its own personal dignity, framed in a flower garden setting, shops haphazardly intermingled. The lush green of the meadow grass round about was relieved with the gold and white of buttercups and tall daisies. Cattle, having grazed the better part of the day, stood or lay, exuding contentment, beneath twisted thorn trees or darkly leaved oaks.

A strange sensation engulfed me: My father, not I, sat again under this tree. "There," he had said, "it's as though you sense the beginning of Time. Greenhill's the spot where the Creator tried out His hand and, delighted, proceeded with the rest of the earth."

In the tall grass within feet of this oak, Robert Thatcher and Florence Burford had sat, she then seventeen, he a year older, already pledged to each other. Many times my father had shown me the snapshot of the two of them there, Florence making daisy chains, putting one on his head. Isobel Burford, her mother, who took that picture, had kept a copy, so delightful it was.

Envisioning the blond, laughing pair, his head in her lap, his adoring eyes turned up to her, a sudden dark thought stabbed my mind. For such a beauty as Florence surely was, would he have killed—revenge the only satisfaction left to him? Only now, in this place of peace and beauty, recalling my father's years of pain, came that stab of doubt and fear. There boiled up inside me a desperate hatred for Florence Burford. She it was who had caused it all. A promise given she had seen fit to break, for a few rapturous moments with a man like Higgins! Moreover, after the consequences of that, she had enticed my father to this trysting place where they meant to say a last goodbye. Enticed, I say, for from whom but Florence could Higgins have learned about the tryst? The following day my father would be gone. He had his passport and ticket for a journey to Australia; he planned to work there for a few years. That meeting blocked his doorway to a new life. Instead, desperate, he had taken work on an oil tanker, and in a roundabout way had arrived in Halifax. Nineteen eighteen was the year, my father back from a German prison camp at the end of World War I. It had been the report of him "missing, presumed dead" that had sent Florence into Bullard Higgins' arms. Belatedly, Higgins had married Florence, seeing a chance to extract money from her parents, subjecting her to beatings when that failed, locking her in her room with the barred window while he indulged his latest fancy.

But had Florence deliberately lured my father to a late tryst under this oak to bring about just what happened? Never once had Dad given a hint of that, nor had I thought of it until now. Had some other person been there whom my father had not seen, knocked out as he was from a blow by Higgins and unconscious for close to half an hour? It would have been known that my father had that revolver with him. He'd talked in the hotel bar of showing it to a friend who wished to buy it. A Luger it was that he'd brought back from Germany. Had the Burford family—under constant humiliation and aggravation by the proximity of the hated Higgins—seen a chance to rid themselves of him? With so little to go on I felt I had to explore even the most unlikely possibility.

There had been the letter that Florence had sent, begging my

father to meet her for one last goodbye: "So I can tell you that in spite of what happened, Robert, I have never stopped loving you, nor shall I, ever. Word came that you were dead, before we knew that you'd been taken prisoner. The letters you wrote never reached me. Without you, I did not want to live. I suppose I reached for any sort of solace, and what looked like sympathy. The kind of life I shall have now is one that I must face as best I can. My memories will be of you. Please, Robert, meet me by the oak tree, where so many other nights we met, so that you take with you that memory of me."

Touched by her letter, and longing himself to see her, my father had kept the tryst. And from some hiding place Higgins had leapt out at him, hitting him with a blackthorn stick. My father was knocked unconscious to the ground.

My father's version of what happened was understandably confused, since he'd suffered a slight concussion from the blow. "I was waiting, alone, under the oak," he said. "It was well after eleven. I'd the revolver in my hand, thinking that I should take out the one bullet that was left. The chap who wanted to buy it was to bring the money next day. And then there was Higgins, leaping at me. But in the second before I went down, I'd a vague notion that I saw Florence, heard her scream. It was only an illusion, must have been, for she never did keep the tryst that night, could not, for Higgins had got wind of it, you see, and had locked her in her room. On the spur of the moment, Higgins coming at me, I must have shot him. There was no one there but the two of us. What Florence told the police was quite true. She was in her room, for Higgins had its key in his pocket."

Two men, returning home to Greenhill late that night, had found my father staggering from the scene, Higgins' blood on his shirt, his own face bloodied from the wound to his head. They saw Higgins lying there, and the moonlight glinting on the gun. The local policeman, Constable Boulton, had arrived. In charge of the case had been Chief Inspector Edward Martindale, he convinced of my father's guilt though willing to go to truly extensive lengths to prove his innocence.

At last, seeing the hopelessness of his case, the certainty of arrest imminent, my father had made his escape, which action served as an admission of guilt. Sympathy for my father counted for nothing. The law takes a dim view of murder, no matter what the provocation.

"Perhaps, Bob, you shouldn't go near the Boar," Dad had said.



"You're the living image of me, as I was back then. You're a Thatcher, through and through. You can't hide that Thatcher smile. Real sunshine breaking through. My poor mother, if she's still alive, might die of shock if you should suddenly appear. Ruth, now, she's sturdy stuff, like your granddad. Never did she believe that I killed Higgins. And although no word has passed between us, I'd swear she's loyal to that."

I did not blame my father for having run away. His going had not left any other person suspect. "To stay was to be convicted, I felt certain, with the death penalty for that," he'd told me. "What chance does a dead man have of clearing his name? I'd the wild plan of going back some day, of being able to ferret out the truth of it. But I think I didn't from my own conviction that perhaps they were right, that I did kill Higgins. If I did, though, why has the idea also persisted, and become stronger as the years went by, that I never fired that shot? My seeing Florence—I mean my *thinking* I saw and heard her that night—was so real. But never would she have let me bear the blame if she could have cleared me. And then I have to come back to the fact that she couldn't possibly have been there."

At age seventeen, Florence Burford, a late child, was a dainty replica of her mother, Isobel. Her luxuriant hair made a frame of gold falling about a face of angelic innocence. Her pale beauty was highlighted by eyes of a rather mystical shade of sea green. There was a happy, healthy glow about her, but a natural timidity, that may have looked to some like enticement, she had not learned to manage. It was not a flirtatious manner, my father told me. A trusting unworldliness, innocence that allowed emotions to show. Her heart worn on her sleeve, her sympathies extended, the vulnerability of youth eager for love.

Florence's falling in love with my father met with opposition from her parents at once. "Innkeeper's son, indeed!" And Claude Burford produced a suitor twenty years Florence's senior, a wealthy landowner's son. Claude could not have devised a swifter way of alienating himself from his sensitive younger daughter, but Florence revealed a surprising strength of will, she vowing that on Robert Thatcher's return from the war she would marry him. Isobel had liked my father, and while expressing a wish that Florence look well at the life of an innkeeper's wife, she raised no real obstacle other than that she thought they were both far too young to marry.

And then the news that Robert was missing, presumed dead. No



letters from him reached anyone, he in a German prison camp. And Bullard Higgins had come home to Greenhill, a handsome hero in his new uniform. Heroes were fashionable just then. And passionate patriotism as well as romantic feeling were at an all time high. In her loneliness and grief, Florence had been easy prey.

A mixture of types the Burford family were. Claude was a CPA retired from service with the British Embassy in India. He was handsome in a heavy-featured way, ruddy of complexion, his hair—what was left of it—a rusty red, carefully trained over his high, domed head. His temperament was as arrogant as his bold eyes suggested, and he was an immaculate dresser, favoring silk shirts and loud tweeds. A cold, domineering man with the family, he exuded charm once outside his front door. A pension of some sort he had, and maintained a connection with the army. Position, a fine front towards the world, was a fetish with him. For Claude Burford, appearances were everything.

Isobel, raised in a convent, had eventually joined her parents, who were also in India. Her golden beauty had attracted many men, but the same shy naiveté evidenced later in Florence had kept Isobel aloof from all of them. That is, almost all of them. For there had been a particular romance with a wealthy Indian prince, and a sudden end to that, which was when she had married Claude Burford, Claude wasting no time in pushing his suit when he became aware that Isobel's father had fallen upon evil times.

Rhoda, their firstborn, was in looks and temperament her father over again. At age twenty-one she usurped her mother Isobel in the management of the house, Claude, by his attitude, having fostered it. Isobel, the gentler personality, had through the years been pushed into the background. Or perhaps Isobel herself had quietly engineered this, for she had a surprising way of turning matters to suit her needs. Through years of living with such a man as Claude, she had worked out her own strategy; a worldliness attained by living abroad in sophisticated circumstances, sometimes treacherous ones, had taught her much. And she had had to learn rapidly. A cold disdain she used as retaliation against the overbearing attitude of Claude, and to some extent that of her daughter Rhoda. It had been remarked that one chilling glance from Isobel's wonderfully expressive grey eyes had the blast of an ice storm. And yet, should one look again, startled by having viewed such a phenomenon, it was not there, just limpid pools, the grey-green of an ocean wave, marvelously sunlit. . . .

Isobel's main concern was with her younger daughter, Florence,

whose every whim she indulged, seeing in her a replica of herself. The remarkable jewelry Isobel wore, much commented on in Greenhill, was her tie with a more lavish past. Fastidious in the matter of clothes, she seldom displayed much that was new in the way of dress. Even so, it was with pride that Claude accompanied her to the various social affairs they attended.

In spite of talk in Greenhill that the Burfords themselves were in reduced circumstances, funds were somehow available to send their son Ambrose to Cambridge, later to medical college, and finally to Harley Street as a specialist. Ambrose's marriage to the daughter of an earl brought Claude's life to a pinnacle of success. Through his son's connections he and Isobel gained entry to the homes of local gentry. With a stately swagger Claude strutted the quiet streets of Greenhill, confident that everyone was impressed. Even so, the Old Hall, the Burford residence, showed signs back then of neglect.

Claude's manner toward Isobel changed, he finally recognizing that only through her, and the charm and grace so natural to her, had he arrived at the social level he had dreamed of but that had been unattainable by his own efforts. His fawning humility had always made his presentation of himself seem pitifully false. Hearing from my father over the years this background of Greenhill's people made the village all the more familiar for me.

Who, besides my father, had a motive for shooting Higgins? What about the Burford family? Their hatred of Higgins was never at any time suppressed. Inspector Martindale had pursued that line of thought. But Claude, for all his bluster and loud talk, backed off when confrontations loomed. What had happened to Florence had been devastating for Isobel, but on the night in question she had accompanied Claude to the nearby vicarage for a social evening, walking home afterwards—for the evening was pleasant—between eleven thirty and eleven forty-five. They had had to be roused from their beds by Constable Boulton, who had found the Hall in total darkness when he arrived.

Ambrose, seldom in Greenhill, was in London. Rhoda had gone there earlier in the week to stay with her brother and his wife. As for Florence, she had been locked in her room, and was discovered there by Constable Boulton, Isobel beside him. The key to that room had been found in Higgins' own pocket. The entire Burford family, they the only others in Greenhill entertaining a monstrous and frequently expressed dislike for Higgins, had iron-bound alibis.

For some time I sat under the oak, listening to the muted sounds

of life below. My thoughts and ideas stirred me to a variety of sensations. And out of my sudden, quite intense, hatred of Florence Burford, I began to remember how my dad had felt about her—not as he felt now but how it had been between the two of them when both had been under the powerful first bond of love. I felt a growing excitement, remembering what my father had said, his voice trembling: “I saw her, Florence, heard her scream before I went down into that awful blackness. But it was all an illusion. I suppose I saw what I wanted to see. But I can never forget that I heard her scream, warning me.”

I couldn’t quite fathom the reason for my excitement. It was as though I had become my father, I myself but an onlooker, watching from afar off. It was one thing to imagine that he saw Florence, expecting her there. But the scream? Why should his mind conjure up that? I stared down at the house where Florence and Higgins had lived, but minutes away, at the foot of the slope. Here, nothing had changed. It was as though time had stood still.

The sun was sinking behind the low ridge of hills in the distance when I retrieved my bicycle and went back to the road through the woods. Coasting down past the Old Hall, where Isobel lived alone now—shabby and overgrown it looked—past the smaller house where Florence had lived immediately below, I came to the center of town, to the village green. There, back beneath the chestnut trees, was the Black Boar Inn. Eagerly, I looked for the name Thatcher on the sign. But no, the licensee was “S. Bennett,” a name my father had not mentioned to me. I could therefore seek a room and a meal, for none here now should be disturbed by my likeness to my father. Deeply moved, I turned the big brass doorknob.

Once inside the shining, comfortable saloon, my Canadian soldier’s uniform excited instant comment among men and women alike, the men notably not young, except for a few in British uniforms. As I approached the desk to request a room, a grey-haired woman turned her head, and with a sudden, shocked expression stared at me. For a few seconds our eyes met. Her smiling, rosy face grew white. “Robert.” The shaking whisper escaped her lips; her hands flew to her face in a gesture of fright.

“Aunt Ruth!” In those moments an eternity passed. “You look like my father.” I found myself whispering, too.

Saying nothing, she turned, beckoning me to follow. In a small, private room she faced me. “His son you must be. Oh, tell me, where is he? How is he?” Tears were pouring down her cheeks.

And then she flung her arms about me in a tight embrace.

Aunt Ruth, her husband Sam Bennett, and I talked far into the night. My grandparents still lived, retired now in the not too distant small town of Hartvale. There, too, retired also, lived Chief Inspector Martindale, bird fancier now, raising canaries and budgies for sale and doing well.

"We had a lawyer, of course," Aunt Ruth told me, "who said that Robert could plead self-defense, for obviously Higgins had attacked him. But no, my brother insisted; he would not budge from the statement he made at first, that he had not fired the gun, that he had had no fight with Higgins whatsoever. At the same time he had to admit that he had had the gun in his hand, and that no one else had been there but the two of them. To my dying day I shall believe that, somehow, someone who hated Higgins as much or more than Robert did, turned the situation to his own cause. But we'll never know. Another thing I never understood was why Florence died at the age of twenty-four. And she a healthy young woman. Went into a decline, the Burfords said, which tells nothing. The child she had was adopted out. Florence's family would have nothing to do with it.

"Ambrose, the son, hasn't been back until recently, when Isobel had a heart attack. Hospitalized she was, twice, in fact. She lives alone in that dilapidated old house, with only Mattie Kirkham for company. Mattie does the shopping and whatever bit of housework gets done; a dour-natured person she is, never gives the time of day to anyone who speaks to her. She was a maid of Isobel's years ago, when they lived abroad. She is devoted to Isobel, which I suppose is a good thing, for Isobel is in failing health now. She's up in years, of course. Claude and Rhoda are serving in the war effort. In London, last we heard."

"How could Claude—I mean, he must be eighty or so now?"

"Oh, everybody's needed these days. Pushing paper around, answering telephones. Rhoda, she's an army sergeant, drives the officers about. So they're hardly ever here. Isobel never did hit it off with Rhoda. Florence was the one she poured her affection on. Both were beautiful women. The Burfords had hoped that Florence would marry well. I think they destroyed Robert's letters, did that to keep those two apart."

The day I went with Aunt Ruth to Hartvale to meet my grandparents, I also met Martindale. A powerful man still, with a ready smile, he welcomed me in to talk. "You're wasting your time, young Robert," he told me. "I know you'd like to see for yourself. But not

a hope in hell have you of coming up with anything new on that Higgins case. Open and shut as I've ever seen. Although . . ." He let his mind run back, scratching among his thick white hair. "I did feel at the time that there was something odd. Higgins' prints on the gun, for one thing. Why? And smudged prints we couldn't identify. Of course, your dad had shown the gun to some fellows at the saloon that night."

I had conveyed the impression that my father was dead. Well, the Robert Thatcher he'd known no longer existed. I sensed he'd rather not know. All that, he had put behind him. The Higgins case had been a disaster for him. It was the one case, seeming so simple, he'd failed in by letting the murderer get away. It had finished him.

"As you see," he said, "I'm a bird fancier, not a policeman. But let me know, will you, should you come up with anything. I see no way that you can."

For all his seeming detachment I was convinced his mind pursued the case still. It rankled, I could tell.

Strolling with him to the street, I commented on the number of military men bustling about.

"We've a German prison camp a mile or so away," he said. "Last night, one of the prisoners got away."

I thought no more of that, and with Aunt Ruth left for home.

So swiftly the days sped in that idyllic spot. I searched through old newspapers and police files, and repeatedly went back to commune with the oak tree. My leave was almost gone. Two days more and I would be back with my unit, flying a bomber across the Channel, all hope gone of completing what I had come to Greenhill for.

It was in the churchyard one afternoon that I got my first look at Isobel Burford. I had tried to get in touch with her shortly after arriving in Greenhill, only to be told that she had gone away on one of her rare trips to London. There was no mistaking the stately figure. White-haired now, she moved with easy grace, slender and tall. There was about her an air of sadness, I thought, that I had not been prepared for; I was always told she was an arrogant person. There was nothing aggressive about her that afternoon, though, as she laid a bouquet of simple field flowers on the grave I was searching for. I came on her suddenly from behind a group of yew trees. She did not speak, nor did I. I turned and walked away. It was her moment of communing with the departed. Not

until after I saw her leave did I venture near the plot where Florence lay.

Reading the inscription had a profound effect on me. The spirit of my father was here. The effect of Isobel, the freshly picked flowers—years were swept away. "Florence Ysolde, daughter of Claude and Isobel Burford. 18 -1920. Peace." Ysolde, vision of beauty. But it was that one word "Peace" that struck me as an incongruity. Only death had brought peace? She but twenty-four years old, the best of life stretching ahead? Suffering for a time, yes, but free of Higgins at last, accepted back in her family? Why had Florence died at so young an age? That brought me to ponder again on my father's insistence that he had heard her scream, had seen her face. But she had been locked in her room, a room with a barred window.

I looked at the fresh bouquet of wildflowers. They took me back again to my father, and the snapshot he had still of Florence and himself, one he'd carried in his wallet the night he fled. He and Florence sitting in the fields beside the Burford house, she making daisy chains, wearing one, and in the act of putting another ring of flowers on my father's head, his face upturned, smiling at her. Someone else had been present, someone who took that picture, Isobel. So she had not totally disapproved of my father. But he had gone away to that other war, and had stayed too long.

I stood for some time looking at the flowers that Isobel had left on the grave, simple wildflowers from the field. And presently came the sensation that I was being watched. I looked about. No person was in sight. Nor did I meet any as I took time to walk by a treelined path up the hill, to sit again at the edge of the woods, under the old oak tree. But even there the feeling persisted, that I was being carefully watched. But I put it down to being in a state of unrest within myself.

I'd come to a dead end. On my account, if for no other reason, my father would go to his grave in sorrow, my failure serving to prove his guilt. I must live with that, in spite of the Granger family's conviction that my father had acted only in self-defense. And there was Roslyn MacArthur. Back home she waited for me. Time here was running out. The sun dipped suddenly behind the distant hill, sending up rays of dancing light, lingering just below the edge of the horizon, as though loath to end the day. My eyes wandered over the area in which I sat. A pink glow covered the slope, crept beneath the branches to touch the trunk of the stout oak; the gentlest breeze carried a wild rose scent. I would not come back here again, ever. Greenhill, for me, had become a sad place.

Catching my eye, on the stem of a briar rose vine, something glinted and twinkled in the beam of dancing sunlight. A dewdrop? The evening was too early, the dew of the morning was long gone. Wondering, I reached out, my fingers coming into contact with an odd object, partially embedded in the briar's prickly stem. A shoot of rose vine had grown up through something that had lain on the ground, over the years carrying it upward, almost enveloping it as the stem thickened. A bulky knot on the stem it had become.

It was a briar shoot grown woody, many feet in length, having reached the top of the build-up of vine and bramble and having crept its way down until the tip hung but feet from the ground. I took out my pocket knife and cut off the shoot, carefully examining the ingrown object. An earring! In the finely crafted gold setting was a shimmering black pearl. In a claw of gold, below the pearl, was a tiny diamond; this it had been catching the beam of dancing light.

I had been recently pricing some jewelry for gifts to take home. I'd looked at a ring for Roslyn, earrings for my mother. I'd asked the price of a pair with black pearls, and had been staggered at the amount. The black pearl I held in my hand had an astonishing glow. Apart from some green matter embedded in the claw setting, it was no worse for wear, except that the soft gold of the screw clip had been bent by the push of vine's growth.

My heart raced with excitement. Twenty-five years this earring had been in this place? Was it possible? That day my father lay here on the ground, Higgins dead beside him, a woman had been here, too? In some fashion her earring had been brushed off, had fallen to the ground, into the soft soil out of sight. And then a rose shoot, pushing up—one year? ten years?—afterward, and growing through, had carried it skyward. What wild fantasy was I indulging in? But there it was, the vine shoot testifying, its little burden there within it.

It could be the property of another woman of a different time, here with her lover on any summer's night. But who here, people of modest means, would have so costly a jewel? None. Not even Florence Burford. For Florence herself had had little if any jewelry, other than a betrothal ring given her by my father. Whoever had the mate to this was the person who had stood under this oak tree, possibly the night of that long ago murder. Even as I stared, fascinated, at the beautifully wrought piece in my hand, I knew that it belonged to Isobel Burford. It had to be, she the only one reputedly having notable jewelry in Greenhill.



I felt elated and at the same time, for some reason, threatened. Excitedly I stood up, and still staring at the earring, bending now and then to examine the place where I had found it, tracing the origin of that rose vine to its source, came to the spot beneath the oak where it was possible that Higgins had lain. But who, after all these years would believe, or even listen to such reasoning? There was nothing at all to back it up. Should I take the earring to Martindale, would he believe my story of where I had found it?

And then, from the woods to my right, there came a terrifying crack. Recent training made me plunge to the ground even as the death sound exploded. The bullet missed me by the merest fraction, whanging with vicious force into the trunk of the oak tree. The sudden burst of sound sent a flurry of birds up from the trees. Scrambling to a safer position, I cautiously searched for movement back among the trees. I could see none, but over the excited twitter of birds, I thought that someone went running off, feet rustling among the dried leaves.

Could it have been an accident? Had someone, trying for a rabbit, accidentally sent a bullet my way? But it was a high-powered rifle shot. One doesn't go hunting rabbits with such a weapon as had just been used. So frequent had been my inspections of this site that one watching me could have been in no doubt that I searched for something. My excited behavior just now could have confirmed my having found that which the interested watcher had lost. Ever since Isobel Burford had seen me in the churchyard, I'd had the sensation of being watched. There had been her shocked stare on seeing me. She would be in no doubt that I was in some way connected with the Robert Thatcher she'd known.

I decided to acquaint Martindale with this newest development, fast. "Not a hope in hell have you got of coming up with anything new in that Higgins affair," he'd told me. But now I had. As far as I was concerned, this was still the Higgins affair; more important to me, it was the Robert Thatcher Case. Feeling confident that the marksman had gone, yet cautiously, I marked the spot on the tree trunk where the bullet was embedded. I could have dug it out with my penknife. But Martindale had to see it where it was. A bullet in my hand would have told him nothing.

Keeping inside the fringe of trees, I went down the far side of the slope, going back into the village along a path through the fields. My thoughts were a tangle of roughly-formed ideas. Had the person firing that shot known what I had found? That there was something I might find? Who but a member of the Burford family

would fear the result of Robert Thatcher's son seeking to uncover facts that should prove his father innocent? The only member of the Burford family on hand was Isobel. Experienced shot she might well be, attending duck hunts and grouse shoots at the estates she and Claude had been invited to. Many years she had lived in India, and might well have hunted tigers, too.

I said nothing to Aunt Ruth or Sam about the shooting incident. It was dinnertime, and the hotel dining room needed their attention. I got out my bike. "Exercise those leg muscles," the doctor had said. But I was thankful that Martindale lived no farther away than the six miles to Hartvale. I wheeled my bike along the flagstoned path to his front door.

"Ed's at the pub," his pleasant wife told me. "You're welcome to come in and wait. Or you can join him at the White Hart. It's but a three minute walk from here."

At the White Hart I found him. Astounded he was on seeing the earring, and hearing the story of where I found it.

"We'll have to alert the army about that shooting. My God, you should have done that right away. Could be that escaped German prisoner. If he's got a high-powered rifle, it could be he's got connections of some sort."

He lowered his voice to a whisper. "There's that munitions dump not far from here."

My skin prickled. I'd forgotten all about the escapee. I should have contacted Constable Wilkins, he the local officer, at once. From the distance a storm threatened; thunder rumbled behind the hills. A stab of lightning cut the night sky.

The army truck sped back to Greenhill, Martindale, my bike, and me crammed in among the rapidly assembled group of Home Guard. Darkness was settling over the woods as the men spread out and disappeared, to search among the trees. Martindale, Constable Wilkins, and I went quietly up the slope, and came to the oak tree, where Martindale dug the bullet out of the tree. I found the long briar rose vine, with its top cut off, from which my rather wilted piece had come.

"Should this prove to be new evidence, can you re-open the case?" I asked Martindale.

"Convincing a court of law that it is evidence isn't the same thing as convincing me," he said.

If there was one episode in his life that Martindale would prefer not to re-associate himself with, it would be the Higgins case. I

could sympathize with him. This "new" evidence was improbable. And yet I sensed a great excitement in him.

I was back in full fighting spirit now. "Something else I'm thinking about. Why would an escaped prisoner attract attention to himself by firing at me? Wouldn't he be more likely to keep his presence secret? I'd like to ask Mrs. Burford about that rifle, but more important, I'd like to know if she has one black pearl earring. Like ears, earrings come in pairs, you know."

"If you've any idea of—young Robert, any stupid act would give someone a legitimate right to put a bullet in you. Why make it easy for someone wanting you out of the way? Remember, there's a legitimate procedure. The army, as well as Scotland Yard, won't neglect to follow through. I can promise you that. Don't go poking your nose into any hornet's nest. I'll be in touch."

At the Black Boar, Martindale and Wilkins stood talking to some army officers who had arrived in a Jeep, dark shadows on the parking lot. I stood back, close to the hotel's side door. Presently, the truck and the Jeep moved away, their parking lights tracing their movement on the tarmac.

There are no street lights in Greenhill. In ordinary times on moonless nights, the lighted cottage windows make the streets comfortably passable, for few blinds are drawn. But now, even in this remote village, every window was totally blacked out. However, being country born and bred, the darkness gave me no trouble. I turned to enter the side door. From beside some shrubbery a dark form stepped out. A woman's voice whispered:

"Mr. Granger."

"Yes?"

She moved to stand beside me. "I've to give you this." She thrust a note into my hand. "Read it now. You've got your flash?"

"You're Mattie Kirkham?"

She gave no answer to that. Stood waiting for me to read the note. Rather clumsily, against the push of wind heralding the rapidly approaching storm, I opened it.

"Mr. Granger," the note said, "it could be to your advantage to talk to me, Isobel Burford. Tonight." The message carried an urgency.

"The answer is yes," I told Mattie.

As her shadow melted away I stood there, wishing that Martindale had not left. I was more than ready to confront Isobel Burford, convinced that she knew something that so far had not been told. That she had some connection with what had happened this after-

noon I felt certain. Now, having seen the danger of attracting attention to herself, she had decided on another approach. Perhaps now, as much as I or my father, she sought a resolution to that violent episode in her life. "To your advantage." The only thing I would consider advantageous was the clearing of my father's name. I experienced no fear, only excitement. The impression conveyed in that brief glimpse I'd had as she laid wildflowers on the grave was of a penitent. Aggression had been totally lacking, too, in the moment of surprise as she'd looked at me. Clutching at straws? Well, yes. Time for me was running out.

It was not until I stood on the threshold of the Old Hall that I was struck by an overpowering sense of fear. But wasn't that ridiculous? I had no proof that Isobel had fired a shot at me. I was visiting a neighbor in peaceful Greenhill, by invitation; a woman who, it was well known, had great integrity and a passion for keeping family matters above reproach; who abhorred anything unpleasant on the social scene. I pushed on the door that stood ajar. There was a rustle of movement in the darkness ahead, and then came the musical voice:

"Come in, Mr. Granger. Close the door so that I may put on a light. There's a stiff penalty for not observing the blackout." The light of a match hissed, showing a pair of hands at the far side of the wide hall. An oil lamp glowed. "Come, please, this way." There was an echo of emptiness about the house. The crack of thunder was close at hand.

I followed the glow of light through a doorway to the left. We entered the dining room, where, on the longish table, she set the lamp. Isobel seated herself at the head of the table, her back to the door, indicating that I should occupy the chair on her right. Bunched in a hump on the table, as though carelessly thrown there, was what looked like a black knitted shawl. For a moment we sat staring at each other. Then, in a tremulous voice she said: "How like your father you are. Thatcher is your name, of course. Granger would have been the name he took when he went away from here. You have your father's good looks, and his charm."

I sat, gawking at her, could not drag my eyes away from her lovely face. She did not look like the person I'd seen in the churchyard, clad then in somber black. The folds of a soft blue robe flowed about her. In her late seventies, or even eighty, she might be, I couldn't be sure. Not a wrinkle, except for faint lines on her forehead, marred her classic face, framed by snow white hair. Her eyes were pale green, or were they grey? I couldn't at once make up my

mind, for they seemed to pick up the color of the robe, too. Her every movement seemed to flow. Had those delicate pale hands clasped on the table in front of her fired the rifle shot earlier? In spite of her efforts to appear at ease, I sensed that she was tense.

"It was good of you to come. I wish I had known earlier that you were here. Mr. Granger, is it not foolish to think that you can prove your father's innocence, after all this time?"

Well, she had come to the point. As I began to speak she leaned toward me and said swiftly: "I'm so sorry, but I must ask you to speak clearly. I'm troubled with deafness these days. Familiar sounds give me no bother. Strange voices are the problem."

"I'm sorry. No, foolish it is not, Mrs. Burford. I'm happy to say that very positive new evidence has recently come to light." I spoke with a confidence I did not feel. This was a game we were playing. The grey-green eyes searched my face. Then, under my close scrutiny of her, she let her gaze fall upon her clasped hands in front of her. She had the appearance of a Madonna praying. I found myself feeling sad for her, so vulnerable she looked. A pale blue ghost she was, wandering about this lonely house, her only companions the other ghosts she found in every desolate room. They had become too much for her to live with at last. She wanted now to be free.

She fortified herself with a deep breath. "Reopening that case can only result in casting further doubt. Disaster lies in that direction, not only for your father but for you. You will be the one to have to live through whatever unpleasantness comes to light. And should you come under a yet darker shadow, how will your father feel then? People have forgotten by now. Go away, Mr. Granger, and leave us in peace."

There was that word again, "peace."

"I wish we could all come upon some kind of peace, Mrs. Burford. Unfortunately, it is denied us who have not forgotten. My father has known little peace. My grandparents here still weep for him. His sister, in this village, weeps for all of us. As for me, all my adult years I've had a force inside of me, a determination to come here one day, to say to the world one day that the deed that happened here was not done by Robert Thatcher. If I do nothing else with my life but accomplish that, then I, for one, shall find peace."

For a long moment she was silent, staring down at her white hands. She sighed deeply. "There is no peace such as you dream about. No revelation can give that. Mr. Granger, I implied in the note that your talking with me could be to your advantage. I have

to assume that you are here to learn about that." A condescending note had crept into her tone. I gathered she believed I was here for some material gain, for which I would keep my mouth shut, or reach, by bargaining, a decision to end my search in Greenhill.

Stung by her tone and manner, I snapped at her. "The only thing I'd view as being advantageous is the clearing of my father's name, Mrs. Burford. Because of what has come to light, I am convinced you've known all along more than you've told. And that for some reason you let my father take the blame for Higgins' death. What's more, I believe you tried to kill me just a few hours ago. I think a police search of this house would reveal the rifle that shot a bullet this afternoon into the trunk of a tree near where I stood."

"Wild talk indeed, Mr. Granger. You can have no proof of any such thing. As for evidence in that old case, every vestige of evidence, if there is any beyond what the police were able to find then, is long gone. You have no chance whatsoever of proving anything now." The grey-green eyes glittered, cold as ice. Her grim smile mocked me. "Even so, your presence here is sufficient to cause me great pain. I'll make it worth your while to leave Greenhill, and never, ever, come back here again. Look."

With a swift gesture she snatched at the black shawl on the table, revealing a box there. She flicked open the catch and upended the box, tipping the contents onto the shawl; and there flashed in the light of the oil lamp an array of jewels such as I had never seen. By some standards I'm sure it was but a small collection, but not even one piece such as I stared at now had I ever come close to, except perhaps in the window of a high class jeweller's shop.

"This is all I have left," she said. "Selling piece by piece is the way we've lived for some time. My recent visit to London was to dispose of a diamond tiara given me long ago by a wealthy Indian prince. These finest pieces I've kept as long as I was able. They're my memories of the happier part of my life. People thought my fine jewels were gifts from my husband, Claude." Her lip curled in disdain. "I could make him squirm, he seeing his wife wearing jewels she'd received from her lover. It was a game I played, getting even with him for the years of humiliation I'd suffered at his hands."

She held a pearl necklace against her throat. "Ah, the cool touch of it! To the end of time they live, you know. But now, I have to let them go." She dropped the necklace in front of me on the table. "It's yours, Mr. Granger, if you will go away and promise to forget. That diamond clasp is worth a fortune."

I hadn't been prepared for this. The sight of all this terrified me. In this lonely, ghost-filled house, one woman alone had this strewn about. A desperate German prisoner, in need of funds, could be watching from the darkness. I glanced nervously about, thankful to see the dark velvet curtains drawn across the long windows. A miracle she hadn't been robbed and murdered, for her jewelry had been well known.

A sound from somewhere in this creaking old house made my scalp prickle. The wind had risen, perhaps it stirred a loose shutter? It wasn't hard to imagine that someone crept in through that still-unlocked front door. I'd closed it, but hadn't turned the massive key in the lock. I felt an inclination to run into the hall and do just that but, fascinated, I remained glued to the chair.

Beyond the nervousness, I was outraged. "How dare you!" She expected me, my father, his family to settle for this! "How unfortunate you are to think that because a person works for a living he has neither pride nor principle. How shallow your mind must be." I sat there hating her.

"Immature you are, Mr. Granger, if you think one gets by on principle. Does principle pay your rent, buy your food, pay for the clothes you wear? Oh, yes, I was a highly principled person, once, and found myself sold off, for a price, when my father came to an end of his money. In my young days women were treated so."

She drew the necklace away from me. "I see I misjudged you, Mr. Granger. Yes, you're more like your father than I'd realized. It was his integrity that so delighted me. Lack of this admirable quality I've lived with for too long."

She fondled the necklace, letting the pearls slide through her long, thin fingers. The touch of them revived some pleasant memory for her. A soft smile again transformed her face, melting the unpleasant arrogance. In spite of my anger I felt a strong, sad sympathy for her. Her mistreatment by those she had trusted and loved had warped her trusting nature. Life had taught her that people could be bought and sold. My anger was subsiding fast. In seconds how changed she was, this was no world-wise one. I saw only the illusion of youth and gentleness. Florence had been her replica. I understood how it had been for my father, how it had been for both of them.

"Through Florence and your father I relived my own love," she murmured. "A prince he was, whom I could not marry. His first gift to me—" She reached for what looked like a small wad of tissue paper, which she began to unroll. Present terrors were gone, for



the moment, from her mind. She lived again in youthful love with her prince. "Priceless pearls such as are seldom found. Emblems of truth. As truth is seldom found."

Slowly, the reams of tissue fell away, and from the depths of a creamy piece of wash leather, onto the shabby black shawl, there fell a touch of gold and the shimmering, rosy glow of a living black pearl, an earring, the duplicate of the one I carried in my pocket. "My God!" Events had swamped my urgency about the earring I'd found.

"They live, you know," she whispered. "A true black pearl has that enchanting glow. Like truth, it never dims."

For some time we both stared at the beautifully crafted piece, the blue of the diamond scintillating in the fluttering lamplight. Then, slowly, from my pocket, I took the rose twig, the earring I'd found still attached to it. I laid it beside its companion piece on the black shawl.

Isobel's hands flew to her face. Her eyes wide with terror, she stared at the long lost gem. There was a desperate silence. Dark shadows seemed to crowd about us. Outside, thunder rumbled, grown closer. Wind rattled the shutters, and began to beat untrimmed tree branches against the house. In a strong draft the lamplight flickered, giving off sounds like the wings of a caged bird, causing shadows to dance on the walls—grey shadows moving about the room like ghosts from a long gone past.

Slowly, Isobel put out a trembling hand. Her fingers hovering above the rose twig seemed helpless to grasp it. Her hands were fluttering. She tried to speak, but no words would come. Terror was choking off her breath. On the sideboard at the far end of the room were decanters. I grabbed one labelled brandy, slopped some of the golden liquid into a glass, and held it while she sipped. Presently, weak and shaking, she struggled to speak:

"My heart! Why I live on I don't know," she gasped. It was a terrified whisper.

"I'll go to the kitchen, and make tea for you?"

"No, no. I'm better now. That—that was what you found, today, under the oak tree? Yes, I'd followed you. I've lived with the fear that one day, someone should find—I could have killed you, but wanted only to frighten you away. Afterwards, I thought it might serve just as well if you could be persuaded to leave, this way." She gestured toward the necklace.

"You killed Higgins, didn't you, Mrs. Burford? Your daughter Florence knew. You took her into your house so that she shouldn't

tell about it. You and your husband kept her prisoner, until you killed her, too."

I was unprepared for her next move. From under the shawl she drew a revolver. Ice was in the lovely eyes, hypnotizing me.

"Mr. Granger, you will not leave this house alive. You yourself make this unfortunate choice necessary. I can say that you entered to rob me of my jewels. In the eyes of the police you are the son of a murderer. My shooting you will be in self-defense."

"Your housekeeper knows I came here tonight at your request. When she delivered your note I told her."

"Mattie can testify to no such thing. She's deaf as a post. She was asleep in her bed before you came."

"You deliberately let an innocent man suffer all these years. And plan a further injustice along those same lines?"

"At the time, I judged it the lesser of the evils. The lives of so many seemed at stake. My doctor son, his wife, Rhoda's chances of marriage. Above all, it was Florence I had to protect. You see, it wasn't at all the way you think. What would your father have done had he known that Florence was the killer? Loving her as he did, he would willingly have taken the blame. For some time we clung to the idea, after he fled, that that was his intent. It did serve to pin the blame on him, his going as he did."

The deadly eye of the gun in her right hand menaced me. Her left hand slid out, this time sweeping all the jewels in front of me. "There's one other way, Robert Granger. You may take everything you see on this table. I'll sign a document of sale. The gun I shall use on myself. It's a promise I've made to myself, to do this thing when all my jewels are gone. And that moment, I've realized, is in any case close at hand. No blame for that shall attach to you. You have my word that there shall be no such incident until long after you're gone from Greenhill."

Florence? If she were the killer, then the woman my father had loved and trusted had betrayed him. Blame should have been his choice. How could I take news of this to my father? His vindication would burden him with a greater grief. I finally got my voice clear of the stranglehold of emotion.

"But Florence was locked in her room. You yourself, the police could testify to that. The locked room itself testified, the key in Higgins' pocket. How, if you were not the killer, did your earring come to be in that place?"

"What happened that night is what I've lived with every day. Not for one moment has the clarity of it dimmed. How could it,

loving Florence as I did? When I put flowers on my daughter's grave, it is as though I have her with me still. Florence's love for your father, his love for her, let me re-live the love I once had.

"That night, Claude and I, walking home, came on Florence running in terror to her house. She had gone to meet your father to say goodbye. Higgins had found out, had followed her, hiding in the trees. He had taken to beating her, sometimes locking her up. But in his sadistic way he wanted to come on them together, obviously intending to cut your father down in front of her. She was screaming that both were dead.

"Your father had waited under that tree, and as Florence arrived Higgins leaped at him. Florence screamed. With a stick Higgins struck Robert down. A revolver he had fell to the ground. Higgins snatched it up, shouting that he meant to finish Robert there and then. He'd been drinking, was in no rational mood, and he stumbled on the uneven ground beneath the tree. Florence got hold of the gun. Higgins laughed, and threatened her with a beating she'd remember for the rest of her life. He'd disfigure her, he said, so that men should look at her face with only horror and contempt. Hardly knowing what she did, so terrified she was and thinking your father dead, for he lay unconscious on the ground, she involuntarily pulled the trigger, not really knowing how, for she knew nothing of guns. The bullet went into Higgins' head.

"Claude and I got Florence to her house. Everything seemed at stake for all of us. My son Ambrose, his career. Our own and Rhoda's future gone. Florence branded a murderer. It was more than we could handle. I can't blame Claude any more than I blame myself for deciding that we must cover up the whole rotten mess. Really, at that point, we thought only of Florence.

"The immediate need was to make it look as though Florence had not been near the tree. We locked her in her room. It would be believed. People in the town knew he'd done it many times. I ran up the slope. I saw both Robert and Higgins lying there. Neither moved as I put the key in Higgins' pocket. I tried to rouse Robert, calling to him, then I heard voices. Two men were coming across the slope. I scrambled past the brambles, one tangled in my hair. Through the woods I got home without being heard, or seen.

"When I reached home I discovered one earring gone. I was terrified that it might be found beside the oak. But since the police didn't find it, I decided I'd lost it in the woods among the leaves. I looked for it many times, and felt confident at last that it would never be found, although I was never free from the torment of that.

I suppose it fell onto the soft ground and I myself trampled it into the soil. Heavy boots would have pushed it farther from sight. At home, the clock in the hall struck twelve. We'd left the vicarage at eleven thirty, and our way home had been but a ten minute stroll. The whole wretched business had taken a little over fifteen minutes. It had seemed like hours."

She sighed, shuddering, in her mind going over that ghastly night. Setting the two earrings on her smooth, white palm, she fondled the errant one, still attached to the wilted shoot. "I wonder how many summers and long winters it lay undisturbed until a rose shoot bore it aloft? It's—it's rather like the truth being thrust up into the light of day." Her hands shook, her voice had fallen to a whisper. "The hand of God." With a caressing movement she set the jewels against her cheek, whispering a name.

For her this room, everything here did not exist. The man she had loved, who had loved her, stood beside her from a distant past. Over the years she had learned to master the recurring horror by replacing it with that remembered love. An age it seemed before she spoke again. The distant drums of thunder rolled softly. Steady rain beat on the flagstones outside the front door. I wondered, vaguely surprised at the nearness of the sound, the plainness of it. But all else had become so suddenly still. At last, with a little moan, Isobel resumed her story. But it was as though she whispered to those who had been with her long ago.

"My poor darling. Your sweet life in ruins. Tortured that you let your love bear this shame. Yes, I know the frightful pain of it. Your dear Robert, I took his poor hand as he lay, begged him not to die. I could not rouse him; he could not speak. So many times he has stood before me in dreams, and again now, he accuses me, close at hand. My love beside him accuses me, too."

She sat up straighter. "Ah, Mr. Granger, forgive me, I have my little lapses. I've indulged them over the years. They overtake me frequently now. Something I was saying, something you wanted to know? Where was I? Oh, yes. We had to watch her, Florence, you know. She had a complete breakdown. Many times she wrote letters to you, telling all that had happened. We could not let them go. In the end, she could no longer bear this shocking thing that she had done to you."

For Isobel I had become the other Robert. It was as though she moved in and out of that trance-like state that took her back; the little lapses that she had for so long indulged were now part of her life. She did not control them, they had taken hold on her. She had

reached the point of being barely able to distinguish one from the other. Even so, she still had the old determination to maintain a grip on herself.

"The note Florence left begged our forgiveness. How pitiful that was. On our knees to her we should have been. 'Please,' she wrote, 'for Robert's sake tell the world about me.' Every time I put flowers on Florence's grave I hear that plea. Awake in the night it haunts me. When I sleep it screams at me. It's my punishment, for the real criminal was I. In her weakest moment Florence was the stronger. I did not have the courage to tell the truth. The hand of God led you, Robert, to where the black pearl lay, and to me, that I might at last beg your forgiveness, and in all humility face the truth; my last chance before I die. I know, for the voice of my love so urgently demands me now. I see it clearly." Her fingers lingered on the black pearls in her hand. "Truth, that is the real pearl beyond price. It sets one free."

With a gentle movement she slid forward on the table. The two black pearls resting on lifeless fingers had taken her back to her love of long ago; they his first gift to her. For a second I did not understand what had happened, then was snatched to the reality that she was dead. I leapt up, calling her name, "Isobel!"

The name echoed strangely in that dimly lighted, shadowy room. For one wild moment I had the weird impression that another voice called, other than mine. But instantly all the shadows fled. Flashlights beamed about as men surged into the room. Martindale was there, others too, in army uniform. Of course! The unlocked front door. That was why I had heard the rain with such clarity; why the flame of the lamp had danced in the strong draft. In their desire to make no noise they had left the door ajar; had heard all that passed between myself and Isobel.

The revolver on the table, though an ancient one, was loaded and in workable state. Isobel had meant what she said.

My Aunt Ruth came. From a room above, Mattie Kirkham was fetched from her bed. Claude, Rhoda, and Ambrose would soon arrive.

I stepped outside, to walk beneath the dripping trees. The rain had stopped; the air was deliciously sweet. Bright stars twinkled high in a clear sky.

# UNSOLVED

by  
*Jerome Meyer*

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the April issue.

At 12:22 A.M. on April 23rd, J. Morrison De Pew Collins, the millionaire banker, was murdered in his New York home. The following four suspects were questioned and their statements are given below. Knowing that each man made four statements, one of which is a lie, can you, by reason and logic, find the murderer? Remember, only one statement in each group is false.

*Red said:* "I am innocent. Shorty did it. I was in Florida the night of April 22nd. I never killed anybody."

*The Rat said:* "Shorty is innocent. Slim did it. I know nothing about the murder. Red was in New York the night of April 22nd."

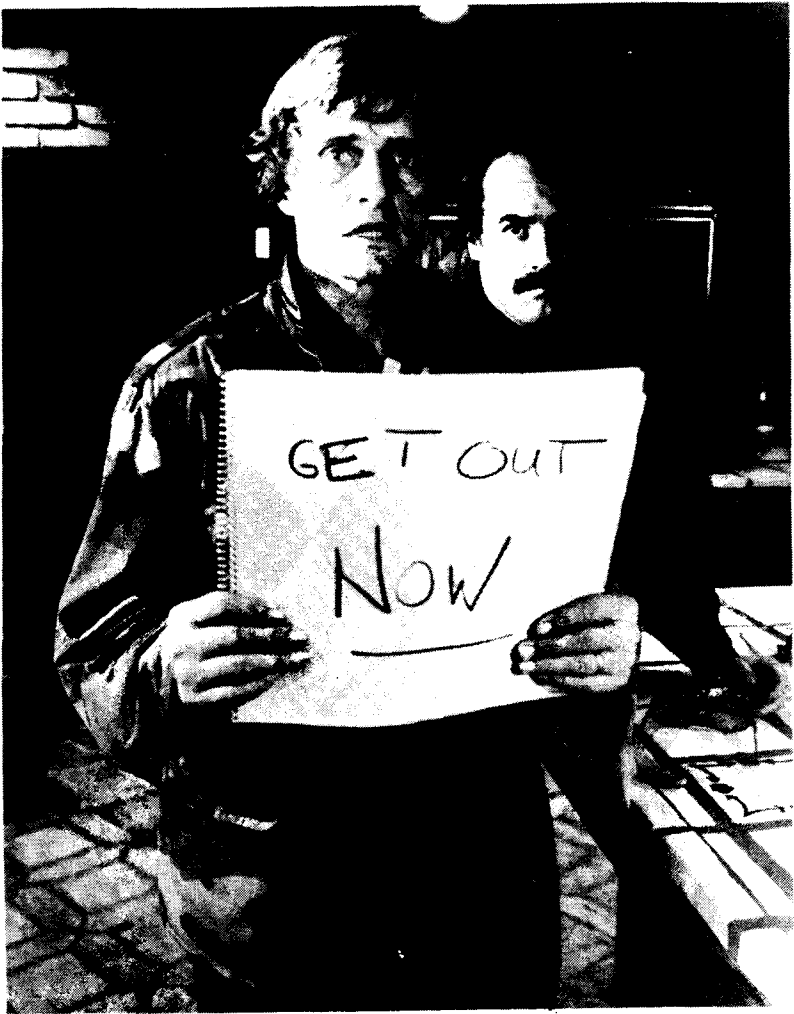
*Shorty said:* "Slim is innocent. I am not the murderer. I was in California the night of the murder. The Rat was with me at the time."

*Slim said:* "The Rat is a liar if he said I killed Collins. I was in Philadelphia the evening of April 22nd. I never owned a revolver in my life. Red is telling the truth when he says he is innocent."

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See page 110 for the solution to the February puzzle.

"The Collins Murder." taken from Puzzle Quiz & Stunt Fun by Jerome Meyer. Copyright © 1948, 1956, 1972 by Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.



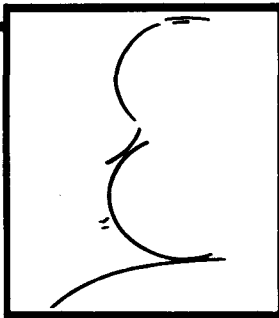
John Tanner, played by Rutger Hauer, warns his friends of danger in *The Osterman Weekend* as Bernie Osterman, played by Craig T. Nelson, looks on.

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# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**R**obert Ludlum's novel, **The Osterman Weekend**, a tight, tricky, but logical suspense thriller about the CIA, the KGB, and a terrorized American family, is hardly visible in the movie version. In the book, an American television interviewer named Tanner agrees to help the CIA determine which of three couples, all of them old friends scheduled to spend the weekend with him, is secretly working for the KGB. When the CIA slips up on its guarantee to protect Tanner's family, he suffers a series of frights along with his wife and child. In a terrifying scene in the cellar of the house, they are nearly shot by unknown assailants firing down on them.

At this point Tanner takes matters into his own hands. He gets hit by a car and shot, but

he fights on for his family, eventually solving the mystery of just who is on which side.

The novel's suspense never lets up—we suspect each of the three couples in turn—but in contrast, the movie's suspense is relieved after a short time. Furthermore, its terror is dissipated when the three visiting couples are put in danger along with the Tanners. All that is left are intricate exposition—more complicated than in the book—and explicit, relatively uncomplicated acts of violence.

In the meantime, lest the audience lose interest, the women are displayed in the nude. They are staying the weekend with the Tanners, after all, and so they must be shown undressing at night, swimming nude in the pool, and so forth.

It is difficult to say what the movie's pneumatic women have

to do with its apparent point, which is that KGB spying is for all intents and purposes but a fevered dream of the CIA. The directors of the latter are presented as incompetents, megalomaniacs, and pathological killers. The CIA gets a bad rap in the book as well, it must be admitted. But though American spy methods and operatives are faulted, we are still left with the general impression that the KGB exists and is up to no good in the world.

Ludlum's John Tanner has the same name as the hero in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman*. The parallel is evidently meant to suggest that in the defense of his wife and family the modern Tanner becomes the superman about whom Shaw was preaching. Ludlum's concentration on the familial source of Tanner's heroism gives the book its power. Concentration on nudity and violence, paradoxically enough, accounts for the movie's lack of punch. On screen *The Osterman Weekend* doesn't stand for anything, and as a result the mystery in it seems unimportant.

**Beyond Reasonable Doubt** recreates an actual murder mystery and trial that took place a few years ago in New Zealand. Both the theme and method of Hitchcock's *The*

*Wrong Man* come immediately to mind, for the condemned man seems almost certainly to have been innocent, and the circumstantial case against him is for the most part presented as though it were a dispassionate police report.

There are two parts to the story. First come the police's gathering of evidence and their search for the bodies of a married couple who have disappeared.

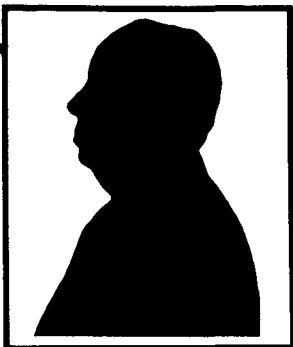
The investigation is laid out before us just as in an old fashioned mystery. Volunteers beat the bushes for miles around in search of the corpses and sift every inch of garden soil for spent cartridges.

Then comes the second part of the story. The police move from one suspect to another, finally settling on a young farmer who once had wooed the wife.

In New Zealand, where the movie was made, the case stirred up great passions (and ended in a Royal pardon along with a million dollars in compensation for nine years served in prison). But seen in America, the story seems distant in space, while the semi-documentary style recalls another time—the fifties and television's *Dragnet*. In fact, watching *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* is more like staying up for a sturdy old mystery puzzler on TV than going to a flashy new movie.

# FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by *Peter Christian*



Nineteen eighty-three's Bouchercon—the mystery enthusiasts' annual weekend get-together in honor of the legendary critic and writer, Anthony Boucher—was held for only the second time in its fourteen-year span in New York City, and the films (surprisingly, for New York is such a media town) were sparse. The previous year, in San Francisco, a film room quite apart from the panels, lectures, and other events unreeled vintage mystery features all day and far into the night. New York's movies, however, were not a parallel activity but were inserted only to close out the evenings—after a program filled with such varied events as a radio play staged as it might have been during the golden age of sound (and called, in a title reflecting the tough-guy heyday, "Kiss My Face with Bullets"), another radio drama written especially for this Bouchercon by Richard Levinson and William Link ("The Memory Game," based on a story they did first for AHMM), a toothy demonstration by the New York Police Canine Corps, a Victorian melodrama music hall—a tuneful collection of murder, cannibalism, and ghost songs—a magician's perspective on psychic frauds by the Amazing Randi, and such very special guests as John D. MacDonald and William Goldman. Surprising, then, with the cinema time so limited, the movies were not recent mystery blockbusters. Instead, they were all vintage antiques: a salute to the detective shows last seen in the early days of television one night, and a film tribute to the late Jonathan Latimer the next.

The television programs were an astonishing resurrection; one forgets how good those primitive shows were. Among the episodes shown: the *Sherlock Holmes* show—the 1955 series shot in Paris with Leslie Howard's son Ronald—in which the first meeting between Watson and the hawk-eyed detective ("You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive?") is chronicled for the only time in cinema history. The late Jack Webb was also given his due. A rare public service vignette he had prepared for the Los Angeles Police Department was shown ("A cop is thought of as a cop even off-duty, twenty-four hours a day . . ."), and a *Dragnet* episode that pointed up—as indeed did every show—the human side of police work. In it, Sergeant Joe Friday suffers with a bad toothache as he plods through his work day. Moving and low-keyed, it rang twice as true as any squad room drama on *Hill Street Blues*.

Other highlights of the TV excerpts included an episode of the *Mike Hammer* series, surprisingly gutsy for 1957, with a clenched, crewcutted Darren McGavin giving an accurate portrait of the famed private eye. Angie Dickinson was also in the plot, as usual leggy and treacherous. *Naked City*, the first police show shot completely on location in New York, was the final presentation, showing the 1959 episode in which John McIntire as Inspector Muldoon was murdered by the mob (his car blown up on the docks), the first time a lead character was killed off in a television series. McIntire was anxious to return to California, so co-star James Franciscus was left to carry on alone.

The tribute to Jonathan Latimer the following night gave the audience an opportunity to screen two scarce detective films from the thirties: *The Westland Case* and *Lady in the Morgue*, both from Latimer books and both starring Preston Foster as tough, resilient, hard-drinking detective Bill Crane, an engaging guy who snatches naps at every opportunity and can spot any brand of liquor at a sip. Meeting this laid-back, Depression-era dick in two pleasant mysteries, very much evocative of their period, was one more treat during a Bouchercon crowded with pleasures.

The next Bouchercon will be in October in Chicago, city of *The Untouchables* and much else—rich in cinema crime!

FICTION

# All at Sea

by Mary  
Monica Pulver

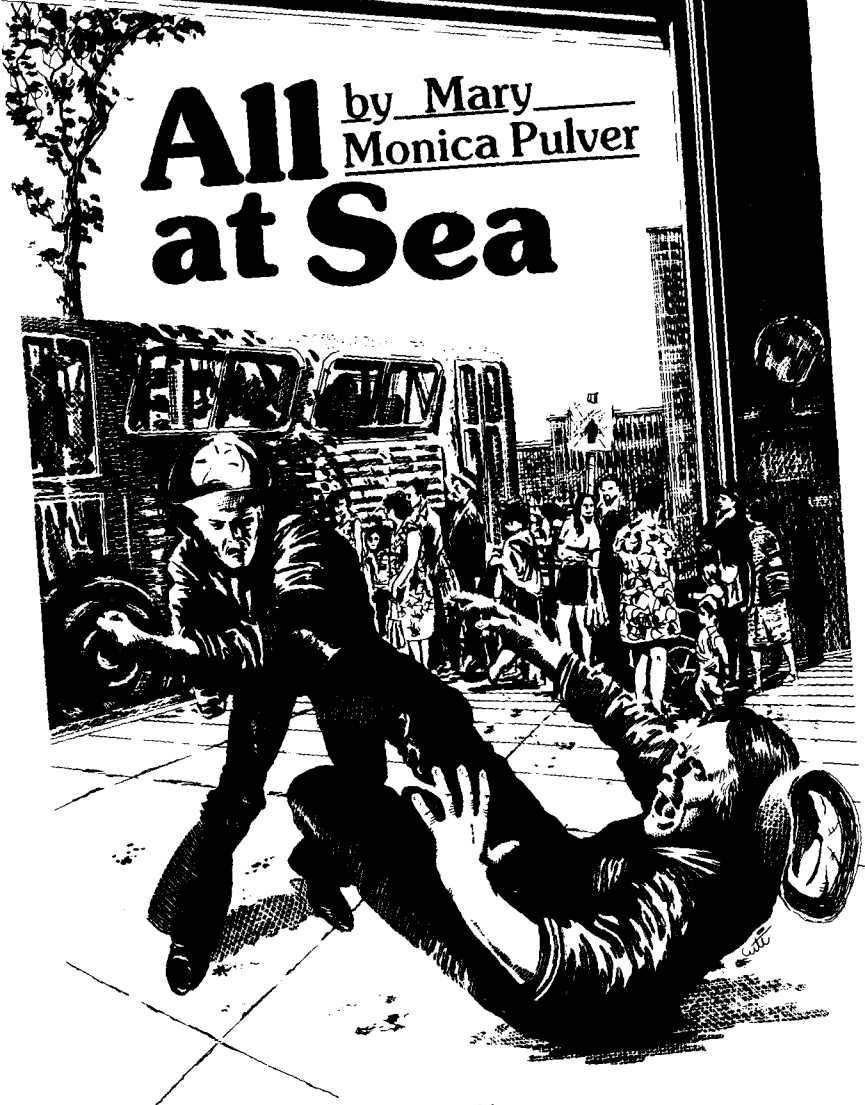


Illustration by Nicola Cuti

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Sergeant Brichter was typing up an interview he'd had with a suspect's girlfriend, his fingers punching the keys of his manual with quick accuracy. He was a medium-sized man of thirty-two, narrow and a little stoop-shouldered, with thinning brown hair and a deceptively mild-mannered air. His shabby blue suit was unbuttoned, his style-less maroon tie pulled loose. It was almost quitting time, and the other two desks were already deserted.

He'd finish this page and stop. He had tickets to a concert of Renaissance music—he began absently to whistle the stately air of an Elizabethan dance—and was going with an old friend.

The door to the squad room opened and a man stuck his head in and called, "Hey, Obie, can I interrupt you?"

"I dunno," Brichter said, without turning around. "You want to try?"

"C'mon, smartass, we got a problem down in booking. Maybe you can help."

Brichter stopped typing to turn cold gray eyes on the man. "Vic, Colly will tell you I've got a full case load. Find someone else."

"No, this isn't a narcotics bust." Sergeant Victor Hinckley came the rest of the way into the room. He was a bald

man in a navy sportcoat, wide without being fat. "I just want you to take a quick look at something. You were in the navy, weren't you?"

"Yeah, for thirteen months about a hundred years ago. Why?"

Hinckley frowned and approached the desk. "Thirteen months? What was it, some kind of reserve program?"

"No. Is this going to take long? I was about to leave."

"I hope not. To tell the truth, I don't know if you can help at all. But you're the only ex-sailor I can find. Come and look, will you?"

"All right." Brichter rolled the paper out of his typewriter and added it to a little stack. He went to a file cabinet, pulled open a drawer, found a file folder and removed it, added his papers to its contents, closed the folder, and replaced it, all with deliberation maddening to a man in a hurry.

"Come on, they're waiting for us," said Hinckley.

Brichter snapped the lights off as they went out into a corridor that smelled strongly of cement. The city of Charter had just dedicated its new Safety Building, which housed the police department, the sheriff's department, and the jail. The jail was on the top floor, but booking was in the basement, where peace officers could de-

liver suspects through a private entrance adjacent to the underground parking ramp. Hinckley opened the door to a stairwell and they started down. After a minute, Brichter said, "How many guesses do I get?"

"Huh? Oh. A patrolman brought in two sailors a little while ago for fighting at the bus depot. The crazy thing is, they both say they're Jessie Post. They each have some proof; one has a military ID card, the other has some emergency leave papers. The photo on the ID card could be either of them. The real one is on his way to a funeral; it's important he catch the next bus east. Problem is: Which one should we let go?"

They came out into a basement corridor, and Brichter asked, "Has he got a family you can call?"

"He's got a mother and a sister, but they're on their way to Norfolk and will meet him at a funeral home there tomorrow. We don't know where they'll be staying. He's the one authorized to pick up his brother's body; he's got to be there."

"I see." They went into the little anteroom of booking where Brichter put his weapon in one of a row of small lockers, then through a door that had to be electronically unlocked. This led to a small glass cage where suspects were turned over to the sheriff's department, which

ran booking. On the other side of a thick slab of glass a deputy at a console waved at them and pushed a button that unlocked another door with a loud clack.

They went down a ramp to the booking area, past a shower room that reeked of disinfectant, past the room where prisoners' valuables were logged and stored, past fingerprinting and photography, to a small green room where complaints of illness or injury were evaluated and, if not serious, treated. Sitting at either end of the room's gray metal desk were two young sailors bearing the marks of recent combat. A nurse in a white trouser uniform was dabbing ointment on one wincing sailor's temple. A fat patrolman was sitting behind the desk, and an unarmed deputy was standing in a corner, watching.

"Maybe if you'd call some motels around Norfolk you'd find the one my mom's staying at," the wincing sailor was saying. "She knows my voice; she'd tell you it's me."

The other sailor said angrily, "We haven't got time for games like that! For Christ's sake, just take another look at that ID card!"

"Now keep your shirts on, okay?" said the patrolman. "Both of you. We'll get this straightened out real soon." He saw Hinckley and stood. "Find



someone?" he asked.

Hinckley came into the room. "Yeah, but he's not much; he was in only a year." He looked at Brichter, who was standing in the open doorway. "What'd you do, insult an admiral?"

"No," said Brichter shortly. "Can we get started here?"

"Sure," said Hinckley, stung. "Tell me, which one is the real sailor?"

The sailors had twisted around in their chairs to look at him, and his pale eyes traveled over each in turn. Though they didn't look identical, descriptions of them would have read the same: six feet tall, average build, brown hair, blue eyes. They were both wearing navy dress blues. They both had spit-shined shoes and tied proper square knots in their neckerchiefs.

The sailor being attended by the nurse said, "Please help me, sir. I'm on emergency leave, to pick up my brother's body in Norfolk and take it home for his funeral. I've got to be there tomorrow!"

He was young and frightened under the bruises.

The other sailor stood and said, "I don't know how he knows that, but it's true. Look, can't you just let both of us go? I won't press charges. We can straighten this out in Norfolk when my mom and sister meet the bus."

"You won't press charges—" started the first sailor.

"Shut up!" ordered Hinckley. "Neither of you is going anywhere till we get this straightened out. What do you think, Obie?"

"They both look like real sailors to me," said Brichter. He looked at Hinckley's face and shrugged. "Vic, I told you, it was a long time ago."

"Can't you think of something to ask them?"

"C'mon, ask me a question," said the standing sailor.

Brichter studied the sailor, then glanced at his watch. He sighed. "Well, all right," he said.

"Thanks, Obie," said Hinckley.

Brichter pointed a finger at the standing sailor. "Come with me. There's an interrogation room this way."

"Sure." Limping slightly, the sailor followed Brichter out the door and two doors down, to a small, plain room painted a soothing blue, whose new looking gray metal table and chairs were bolted to the floor.

Brichter took a seat and waved the sailor to the chair crosswise to the end of the table. The sailor obediently sat, pushing his white hat to the back of his head. Brichter took out his notebook and put the time and date at the top of a blank page.

"You don't have to answer my questions," Brichter began. "You have the right to remain silent. If you want to consult an attorney before answering my questions, we'll arrange that, and your attorney is permitted to be present during questioning. If you want an attorney but can't afford one, we'll assign one to you. Do you understand?"

"That sounds like you think I'm the guilty one! Like I told that cop, it's the other guy who attacked me!"

"I'm Detective Sergeant Otto Peter Brichter, which makes me a cop, too. Right now you're both equally suspect. With that understanding, do you still want to waive your right to silence and answer my questions?"

The sailor thought, then nodded. "Well, all right. Go ahead."

"What's your full name?"

"Jessie Dillon Post. Sir."

"Date of birth?" Brichter was writing.

"Seven July 1963."

"How long have you been in the navy?"

"Ten months."

"Where are you stationed?"

"The aircraft carrier USS *Ranger*, CVA-61." The sailor's hand sketched a gesture towards the narrow curved patch on his left shoulder, which was embroidered with the name and number of his ship. Below it were the three angled green

stripes of a sailor working towards a skill in the aviation branch. Brichter glanced at them.

"E-3, airman?"

"Yes, sir."

"*Ranger* still homeported at Alameda?" asked Brichter.

The sailor frowned. "Yes, sir."

"What do you do aboard ship?"

"Aircraft handler. I'm gonna be an Aviation Boatswain's Mate."

Brichter nodded, noting that he pronounced boatswain properly, bo'sun. "I was a deck rat aboard *Ranger*, too, once," he said.

"Yeah?" The sailor shifted in his seat as if to ease hidden bruises and touched a bruise on his jaw gingerly. Brichter noted also that he had turned back his blouse sleeves to protect the piping around the cuffs, a common practice. The young man asked, "When were you aboard the *Ranger*?"

"Late sixties. They still identify the flight deck personnel with different colored shirts?"

There was a sudden amused glint in the sailor's eyes. "Sure. I wear a blue shirt."

"I was in the crash crew."

"That can be dangerous."

"It was. I'm sorry about your brother. What was he doing at Norfolk?"

"He's not at Norfolk yet. He was at sea, aboard the USS *Nimitz*. Bob was a regular

Boatswain's Mate. He fell down a ladder." He meant stairs; people fall off ladders. Sailors call stairways ladders.

Brichter made a note while the young man sucked gently at a sore knuckle. "So you're picking the body up from the USS *Nimitz* when she ports, to take it home for the funeral?"

"Yes."

"Where's home?"

"Philadelphia. I hope we can get this settled so I can get out of here to catch that bus."

"Why didn't you fly?"

"I did, from Alameda to Chicago. Caught a military flight, free. But the weather's real bad farther east, and nothing's going that way. So I took a bus. I got off here for chow."

"You want to tell me about the fight?"

"I met the other guy—he was in civvies—in the restaurant. He knew a lot about the navy; I thought maybe he was a navy brat. We talked too long, and I was running through the alley on my way back to catch the bus, and I got mugged. I didn't see who did it. I woke up and went to the bus station, but my bus was gone. And he was there, in one of *my* uniforms, with *my* seabag, so I went to ask him about it. Big mistake! He socked me, and I socked him back. Someone called the cops and here I am." He grinned ruefully.

"You figure he was the one who mugged you?"

"Sure. He took my leave papers and the key to the locker where I left my seabag. He took my other dress uniform out and put it on—the bastard; now they're both a mess." The sailor looked down at himself, brushed at a smudge on one knee. "Dammit."

"Okay, that's pretty clear. I'll take you back and talk with the other man, and maybe we can get out of here."

They returned to the medical treatment room and Brichter took Hinckley out into the hallway. "Well, I'm sure I've forgotten as much as I ever learned of navy jargon, but this guy knows the right words."

"So you think he's the real sailor?"

"Maybe. I'll talk to the other one."

"Okay. Oh, the intake officer called California. Jessie Post's ship, the *Ranger*, left Alameda yesterday for the western Pacific. We'd have a bitch of a time trying to get hold of it."

"Her."

"What?"

"Trying to get hold of her. Ships are referred to in the feminine gender. Who told him she was homeported at Alameda?"

"The other kid, the one you haven't talked to."

So it wasn't going to be easy.

The second sailor followed

Brichter back to the interrogation room, hat in hand. He had rolled the brim of it down all the way around, another common practice. He sat down stiffly, putting the hat on the table.

Brichter explained his rights to him and got permission to interrogate. He asked, "What's your full name?"

"Post, Jessie Dillon, sir," replied the sailor nervously.

"Date of birth?"

"Seven July 1963, sir."

"Where are you stationed?"

"USS *Ranger*. Were you really in the navy?"

"Yes."

"Officer, I bet."

"No, enlisted."

"Yeah? Aboard ship?"

"The *Ranger*." Those had been good times.

The sailor smiled. "Black shoe?"

"No, an airdale, like you."

"No kidding. Yellow shirt?"

"Red."

"Fuel or crash?"

"Crash. Working recovery."

"Not for me; I like the bow end. I'm striking for air boats."

Brichter resisted the feeling of rapport this young man was arousing in him. "You're an E-3, right?"

"Airman, yeah. But I'm gonna ace that third class next year and they'll have to give me my crow." Brichter smiled; the young man was announcing his

intention of getting every answer correct on the next examination for petty officer, thereby earning his eagle and chevron. "How come you only served a year?" asked the sailor.

"Landing gear collapsed on an A-4 and I was in the wrong place when it blew. Lost most of a rib and part of a lung, and they gave me a medical discharge."

"Wow! All I've seen so far is a cold cat and the angel got the pilot okay."

Brichter relaxed, resistance gone. He knew where the feeling was coming from, just as he knew what the young man meant. When the pressure on the steam catapult that launches aircraft from the flight deck is not high enough, a jet may not have air speed and will plunge into the ocean. A helicopter that hovers nearby during launches then flies over to rescue the dunked pilot. That was what the sailor had seen happen. "Argot," murmured Brichter, satisfied, writing.

"Ar-what?"

"Nothing. Tell me about your brother."

"Bob is—was—a first class Boatswain's Mate. Ran the captain's gig and the liberty launch and other boats on the USS *Nimitz*. He fell down a ladder, broke his neck. Happened over a week ago, at sea."

"Kind of an odd accident for

an experienced sailor, isn't it?"

The sailor hesitated, looking caught out. "Oh, well—you know."

"No, I don't. What happened?"

"He was late going on watch, got in a hurry, I guess."

"Was he drunk?"

"No."

"Stoned?"

The sailor studied Brichter, then shrugged unhappily. "Maybe. I got a letter from a friend of his. And he said . . ." The sailor shrugged again. "The *Nimitz* was coming home from the Med. Dope is cheap there, and Bob—well, Bob wrote me that you can make a hell of a lot of money bringing it home to sell. He said he knew someone who'd buy it. He wanted me to get in on it. He said I could get opium cheap in Tokyo."

"What did you say?"

The sailor looked shocked. "I told him no! I don't want anything to do with that stuff! People who sell it usually try it, and it screws you up. Stoned sailors kill shipmates—accidentally, maybe, but still . . . No, no way! And I told him he should knock it off himself."

"But he didn't listen to you."

"I—I guess not."

"Why didn't you fly to Norfolk?"

"I hopped a MAC into N.A.S. Glenview, but it was socked in farther east. So I grabbed a bus."

"Tell me about the fight."

This sailor's version was virtually identical to the other's, with roles reversed; it was the other who was in civvies, the other who stole his wallet with his ID card. "And my seabag—I brought everything with me because with *Ranger* gone to WestPac I don't know how or when I'll get back to her."

"When you were talking in the restaurant, did you tell him about your brother?"

"I told him my brother was dead, and I was meeting my mom and sister in Norfolk, but that's all. I didn't tell him my brother was a sailor; I didn't want him asking questions. We talked about what I did aboard ship; he knew a lot about the navy. Why did he want to take my place?"

"Good question, Jessie. Let's go back now."

"Jessie? Does that mean you believe me?"

"No doubt about it."

They walked back to the medical treatment room where the other sailor waited with Hinckley and the patrolman.

"What'd I say?" asked Jessie, as they came into the room. "What made you believe me?"

Hinckley asked, "Now you think *he's* the real one?"

"I know he is. Because he knows the argot as well as the jargon."

"There's that word again,"

said Jessie. "What's it mean?"

Brichter, forgetting he had a concert to go to, lapsed into his lecture mode. "Let's say jargon is the technical language of a profession," he began. "For sailors, it includes terms like *fo'c'sle*, bridge, port, and starboard. But there's a slang in every profession, as well. Call it argot. For sailors, this would include words like *crow*, *air boats*, and *angel*. Jargon you can learn from books, but argot is picked up only by being there. Our fake sailor did his homework, but I'll bet he's never put to sea." He looked at the sailor sitting beside the desk. "If you can tell me what a cold cat is, we can reopen the question."

The man's eyes shifted from Brichter to Jessie and back again. "Damn!" he muttered softly. "Well, what's the charge? Assault? Robbery? When do I get my phone call?"

"You haven't been charged with anything, yet," said Hinckley. "Maybe you want to tell us what this is all about?"

"Go to hell."

"What's your real name?" asked the patrolman.

The man hesitated, then shrugged. "Alan Burke."

"Why did you attack this man, steal his wallet and duffel bag?" asked Hinckley.

Burke did not answer.

"What do you think, Obie?" asked Hinckley. "I've heard of

sailors trying to convince us they're civilians, but why would a civilian try to convince us he's a sailor?"

Brichter pulled an ear. "Well, Burke couldn't fool Jessie's mother or sister, or Jessie's shipmates. He'd have been able to pick up Bob's body from the *Nimitz*, probably—but so what?" Brichter frowned. "With the body would come the personal effects. There it is: Jessie told me Bob was bringing dope home from overseas because the profit was tremendous. Among those personal effects I'll bet there's hash, or even heroin, maybe a whole lot of it." He turned those cool gray eyes on Alan Burke. "Bob told his brother he'd already found someone to sell his dope to. So maybe there's also something in his effects that would identify that person."

"You're guessing," said Burke. "You don't know anything."

"Maybe. But how come you knew all about Bob when Jessie says he didn't tell you anything?"

"He's lying," said Burke, licking his lips. "He told me."

"Well, we've got him for impersonating a sailor," said Hinckley. "That's enough to call in the feds. They can investigate the rest. The USS *Nimitz* is out of our jurisdiction."

"Does that mean I can go?" asked Jessie.

Hinckley said, "They'll want to talk to you, too."

Brichter said, "How about we let them do that in Norfolk? No need to have the feds walk in cold on his mother. Where's Jessie's seabag? If we hustle, maybe he can still catch his bus."

Hinckley said, "In the property room, by now. I'll go get it, if you'll get this jerk out of the kid's other uniform."

Jessie made his bus, and Brichter, by not taking time to change out of his shabby suit, was on time for his concert. And two weeks later, Hinckley called. "Obie, we were right. They found fifty grams of heroin in Bob Post's effects. And also a note Burke had sent, setting up a time and place to meet, quoting a price. And naming another sailor on the *Nimitz* as a reference. He's the

one who wrote Burke about Bob Post's accident. Because of us, the feds have broken up a little ring just as it was getting started. They thanked me, with a copy to the chief."

"Nice of them. I guess their letter to me got mislaid," said Brichter.

Hinckley laughed a little uncomfortably, and agreed.

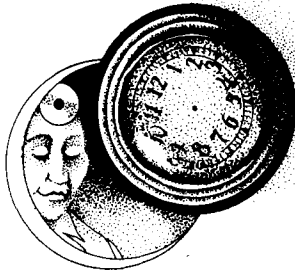
That evening, Brichter sat on the couch in his tiny apartment to read his mail, his smile awry. Through every sentence of a newsletter he'd gotten there was an unmistakable odor, a mix of hot metal, burning kerosene, tar, and salt water—the smell of the flight deck. It was the *Dockside*, *Ranger's* newsletter. He'd been put on their mailing list by Jessie Post, a thank-you he would almost rather have had than a letter from the feds.

### **SOLUTION TO THE FEBRUARY "UNSOLVED":**

Albert killed Dwight.

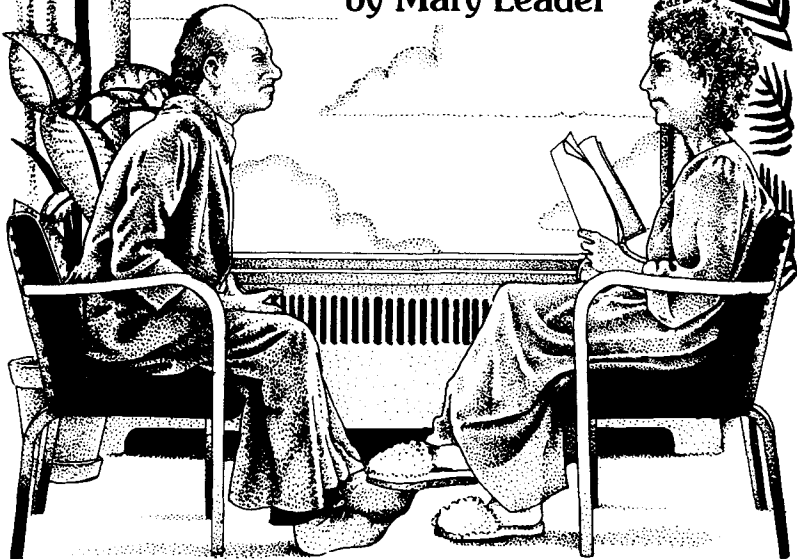


FICTION



# Happy Forever

by Mary Leader



*Illustration by Glenn Wolff*

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She was seated by the window in the hospital lobby, gazing out on a tree-shaded park. "You are to wait here," the orderly told the man before leaving. "You've been very sick."

There was something startlingly familiar about her—the curve of her cheek and the way she tilted her head, although Daphne never let her long gray hair fall loose, but wound it instead in a wispy little bun on top of her head. This woman's hair was curly and red and she was clad in a low-cut red caftan that Daphne would certainly have spurned.

Not that he minded Daphne's modesty but it had been a deceptive trait, for until they'd married he'd thought her a clinging, rather simple-minded thing. Instead, under that ingenuous exterior lurked an incisive, willful intelligence such as his other wives had never possessed, and it disconcerted him considerably. It had been obvious he'd have to proceed more slowly and cautiously than with the others.

That had meant a longer relationship than he had anticipated, although, of all his wives, she was the one he'd most disliked. And she had cost him more, narrowing the profit on what he'd expected to be a lucrative venture. So he'd grown more and more impatient for the free life with plenty of money to spend on pretty young things who would warm his rapidly fading libido.

She had seemed so right when he met her through the dating service—plain, but with great, doelike eyes—a childless, wealthy widow. He knew that in his profession he had to endure things no ordinary bridegroom would, but she was endowed with more than the usual share of annoying habits, such as grinding her teeth, wearing gardenia perfume that turned sour on her skin, tapping the page when she read a book, and filing her nails in bed.

Her headaches, however, were more a plus than a flaw—they fitted in with his plans perfectly.

He scanned the lobby, looking for something to read, something like *Hustler*, preferably—ah! there on the end table!—but her hand was quicker. He retreated into a chair, staring at the cheerless walls crowding in around him, making the room seem strangely smaller.

He started to reach for his pocket watch but remembered that something sharp on the winding stem had pricked his finger when he tried to set the watch for Pacific time as the plane approached

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San Diego. Daphne had given it to him when he left, saying tearfully that it had been her father's.

His eyes shifted to the park beyond the window, where people were roaming or playing games. If only that orderly would return with his hospital discharge so he could get to his hotel to see if there'd been any word.

The cramps that had hospitalized him had stricken him during his first night in San Diego—it must have been that Mexican dinner.

He remembered the doctor saying there wasn't much hope, and then he'd blanked out.

But here he was and soon he'd have word about Daphne.

**S**he concentrated on her magazine, ignoring the man seated near her. For a moment she'd thought—but Casper was miles away and he'd never wander around in a red dressing gown.

Maybe he was a mental patient, she thought uneasily.

Poor Casper! It must be over now, but considering how ill she'd been, they wouldn't have given her the news. There'd be word back at the apartment. A nuisance, this hospital stay, when she needed to be arranging her affairs, flying to Paris.

What a washout Casper had been. He'd posed as an affluent widower—without heirs—but they hadn't been married long when she discovered his "fortune" was as imaginary as hers. So she'd broken her rule and gone along with him on that large and expensive insurance policy.

The marriage had been a disaster from the first night when he'd removed his toupee and false teeth and laid them on the night table. Afterward, he'd cleared his throat and swallowed "whatever" all night. Furthermore, his feet stank.

Sex with him was only a gleam in his contact lenses, but that wasn't the purpose of this marriage anyway, was it? Still, she had to be careful, always keeping that insurance policy in mind. She feigned headaches, making a point of taking aspirin in his presence. When he left for the Coast on business, her elation knew no bounds, and she had a permanent and a tint to celebrate. But the tension triggered a genuine headache, so she'd gratefully taken the last two capsules in the bottle. By morning she'd been in the emergency ward.

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Where in hell was that orderly? The hands and numbers on the wall clock were strangely missing. Uneasily, he thought again of Daphne. Had it worked? It must have—she swallowed aspirin like candy.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," he said, "but would you have any idea where that orderly went?"

"No, I wouldn't," she replied, continuing to read.

Feeling rebuffed, he'd started to sit down again when his eye was caught by a woman out in the park, walking hand in hand with a nice looking man. Good Lord! Grace! But she'd been dead for years!

"Sam!" the woman behind him exclaimed, wheeling him around to face her.

"Daphne!"

"Casper!"

"You can't be here," he stammered. "Not in San Diego!"

"But this is Providence," she blurted out, and then realization came into her eyes. "No, it's not. We're dead, Casper—don't you understand?"

"You're crazy! I'm about to leave for my hotel as soon as that goddam orderly gets back."

"Ah-ah!" She wagged her finger. "I wouldn't use that word—not here. We're dead, all right. I just saw Sam—one of my exes—out there. And see how the walls have shrunk!" She brushed a lock of hair out of her face. "I hope they have beauty shops here. I don't ever want to go back to gray."

He must be delirious. This *couldn't* be Daphne.

Could this be her ghost haunting him? He turned, only to face a blank wall.

"You can't run from me," she mocked him. "You poisoned those last two aspirins, didn't you? The only time I really had a headache! And then you wound the watch I gave you—the watch I used on all my husbands. I smeared ricin on it—ricin, the most toxic and least detectible substance in the world—it comes from the castor bean and there's no antidote. What did you use on me?"

He could tell her—she was only a ghost. "Something slow-acting I got in India. I don't know the name. And now that you're dead, I'll collect the insurance."

"And do what with it?"

"Spend it all, on women . . ."

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"Not any more. Not with those wrinkles—and not without your toupee and teeth."

He felt his bald head, then his mouth, sunken between his chin and nose. "I've been robbed!"

"No, you just couldn't bring along anything that wasn't part of you."

He felt the room moving, shifting.

"Look now," she said. "The room's little more than a cell."

The walls were almost on them, their chairs shoved together so their knees nearly touched.

"That must be heaven out there," she observed. "Maybe the door will open and we'll . . . I don't know, though. Heaven's not supposed to be the place for our sort."

He scanned her raddled face in its henna halo. "It'll be heaven if I can just get away from you." He tried the door but it held.

"It's no use trying to open that door," a voice sounded from above.

The orderly was peering down at them from an opening where the clock had slid to one side.

"What in hell are you doing there?" the man snorted.

"How apt!" the orderly said, a grin on his face. "She's smarter than you, you know. You *are* dead."

"Then where are we?"

"In hell, as you just said."

"I don't see any flames."

"Certainly not; my master's an artist at designing hells to suit individuals. He thought you'd enjoy seeing how happy your ex-mates are in heaven. Quite a favor you did them."

"I don't believe in hell!" the man fumed.

"Naturally, or you wouldn't have striven so for it. My master designed this just for the two of you. He thought nothing could be more torture for you than to spend eternity together. Happy forever!"

The clock slid back into place and they were alone.

They stared at each other for a moment—or maybe an eon—then, with a gesture of despair, she picked up the magazine and slumped back down in her chair.

"Stop tapping that page!"

"Get those stinking feet off my chair!"

"Must you grind your teeth?"

"And you! Stop . . ."

# Days of Crime, Day of Friends



I opened file drawers frantically. No luck. I seemed to be out of *meishi*, and for a businessman in Japan, a lack of *meishi* can be a major embarrassment.

"Do not worry," consoled Masahige Goto as I transferred my frenzied ransacking to the desk. "I know where a superior product can be obtained."

by Ron  
Butler

"Worry isn't the right word," I replied to the chief clerk of my computer hardware company. "I've got a lot of meetings coming up next week, and I don't want to be caught empty-handed, that's all."

Goto plucked at an elastic sleeve garter and grinned. "Sobei Mizuno, a cousin of mine, is the owner of a *meishi* store. I will ask him to complete the order in a reasonable time, certainly no more than a few days. It is a simple matter, one confronted by thousands of Japanese every day."

I lowered myself into the swivel chair and leaned back. "I don't want to waste any time. How soon can we get a start on this?"

Goto regarded the electric wall clock. "Well, it is almost time for lunch."

I took the bait. "On me, of course." What's a minor expenditure when one's supply of *meishi* is at stake? "Give me a couple of minutes to call home, and we'll leave early."

Noriko, my wife, was aghast when I told her that I wanted Goto to plug for a hurry-up job on the *meishi*. "Sam Brent," she intoned firmly, "you are an important man, and haste in acquiring the proper business cards could influence your reputation adversely."

"But, Noriko," I protested, "surely the company's success

in Japan means more than some scraps of paper. After all, my last batch of cards was nothing fancy—just run-of-the-mill stuff." In the ensuing silence, I could visualize her patient smile, the batting of lashes she uses to indicate one of my inadequate understandings of Japanese traditions.

"Oh, all right," I conceded, "I'll call your father and take him along to see that I don't goof."

"*Ti desho*," she purred. Fine.

Okayama Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki was more than willing to pitch in with the enterprise. In fact, he was insistent. "Noriko," he said solemnly, "is absolutely right. A man of your standing must have the appropriate cards, and I confess I did not approve of the stock you have depleted."

"Come on, Toshihiko, it's no big deal. The last cards I had seemed to do the trick. At least, no one made any unfavorable comments."

"It would be to your advantage," he went on in his patience-with-son-in-law tone, "if I accompanied you to aid in the selection. When do you wish to do it?"

I wished I'd done it yesterday, without telling anyone. "Goto and I are going right after lunch."

"Lunch?"

I issued a sigh along with the



expected invitation. "Ishige Sushi. In about thirty minutes. That okay with you?"

"Hai," the inspector said cheerfully. He hung up with the observation that his appetite was unusually sharp today.

I propped my feet on the desk and contemplated the situation. Whenever I got to feeling that I was on firm ground in Japan, I inevitably blundered into another wall of enigmatic customs, banging my nose on the unexpected. Business cards, for example. Anywhere else in the world, they were just that—a few lines of print giving a person's name, company affiliation and position, and telephone number.

Basic information. But, when I stopped to think about it, there were subtle, often convoluted meanings to those cards in Japan that exceeded mere indicators of rank and profession. The Japanese employ status symbols that elude many foreigners. Degrees of politeness, body posture, how deeply one bows, and a language that can be exquisitely vague are all used in establishing and maintaining the relationships that form the tapestry of social and economic life.

I knew a few bigshots in the steel industry who advertised their exalted stations without the appearance of immodesty by passing around paper-thin

slices of printed metal by way of cards. And on a couple of occasions I'd met businessmen who were supposed to be so famous that their *meishi* bore their names only—no titles. For someone of ordinary clay, like me, the standard was a white card with Japanese characters on one side and, sometimes, English on the other. To top it off, business cards for women differ from those of men—they're rounded at the corners.

What impressed me most about *meishi* was the passion for exchanging them. The ritual was set: swap, bow, offer profuse thanks, carefully stow card in safe compartment of billfold, and bow again. I guessed that I handed out several dozen a month, receiving so many in return they had to be filed by Goto to relieve the strain on my wallet.

A lot of fuss, I concluded, but no cause to work up a lather. I'd let the inspector and Goto do the hemming and hawing, go along with their recommendations, and have enough cards made up to avoid this hassle for a long time to come.

I looked up from my desk and saw Goto waiting by the door. Time for lunch. And *meishi*.

Eating out in Japan is a period of unabashed self-indulgence for me. It's a time when I forget the

similarities—the like concerns that seem to govern all of humanity—and allow myself to glory in the differences.

The thrill of the Japanese restaurant, in my estimation, commences when one first enters and is greeted by smiling faces singing out a welcome. It escalates into the joy of the fast, efficient service that prevails from the most expensive tourist spot to the humblest eatery, tucked away in some impossibly narrow alley.

It may be that chopsticks play a role in an experience that brings into play all the senses: to use them with expertise, it is necessary to judge distances and the texture, weight, and size of the various morsels—to *look* at the food that is displayed, not merely set, at one's place. Under this system of culinary art, even the common white radish assumes special appeal, diced and splayed like some exotic unfolding flower, or shredded into a snowy peak.

This mild winter day, however, my usual enjoyment was diminished by Inspector Ueki's squawking portable police radio.

"Is that thing really necessary?" I asked.

Ueki glanced up from his *miso* soup. "The volume, Sam, is at its lowest effective level."

"Yeah, but can't you turn it

off when we eat? It doesn't exactly contribute to a relaxed atmosphere."

Ueki maneuvered a clump of buttered rice between the tips of his chopsticks. "Orders from Mayor Kawahara, Sam. Everyone must carry one, including the men in squad cars when they are out of their vehicles."

"Why is that?" Goto inquired, dipping eel in *shoyu* sauce.

Ueki smiled. "Mayor Kawahara is determined to exclude Okayama from the recent rise in the national crime rate—to keep it a lawful and peaceful city."

Oh, brother, thought I. There's more theft, graft, and violence in any major American city during a week than plagues Japan in a month, but now I've got to listen to that blasted radio because the mayor's got a case of the jitters. "Marvelous," I said aloud.

"Not marvelous," countered the inspector. "Efficient." He laid his chopsticks across the ceramic holder and used his napkin. "Where must we go for the cards?"

Goto told him, and Ueki nodded. "That's near police headquarters, so we will take my cruiser and you can return to your office by taxi."

I settled the bill, but a few minutes later, while tailgating a trolley, Ueki got a radio call dispatching him to Okayama

Station to check on reports of men there, selling illegal stimulants.

"This shouldn't take long," the inspector said, cutting around the trolley suicidally.

The siren seemed to be a screeching lament to my chances for getting the business cards out of the way quickly. I gritted my teeth and held on.

Punks are punks, anywhere in the world. Or so I believe. The two I saw at the north exit of Okayama Station were, unmistakably, up to no good. One stood with his back to the white-tiled wall, hands shoved into the pockets of a short and dirty windbreaker; the other rested on his haunches near a stairway, one hand on his knee, the other flipping a flamboyant necktie.

The two men, in their mid-twenties, were eagle-eyeing the passing throngs, including a number of black-uniformed high school students. For my money, they were suspicious for what they were not doing rather than for any overt behavior. In a land where everyone hustles and bustles—and especially in a busy train station—they were loitering, idle though sullenly expectant. The short distance separating them suggested that, whatever their intent, it was in tandem.

"Walk by them, Sam," In-

spector Ueki requested while we were still some distance away, "and say something about calling the police. Then stay where you are."

"What good will that do?"

"Please, Sam. I will explain later."

So I did it, beetling my brows and putting forth my best glare as I stopped by them. "I don't like your looks," I said, loud enough to draw stares from passersby. "Maybe I ought to get a cop over here."

They glowered, fidgeted—and hurried away. Goto came to my side, and we watched Ueki follow them to a bank of coin lockers. When they swung back the doors of adjacent cubicles, the inspector closed in, took them by their shoulders, spun them around, and slammed them against the lockers.

Ueki had them handcuffed together by the time Goto and I reached them and was removing the lockers' contents. Inside were dozens of small bottles filled with a clear liquid.

"An infamous and dangerous inhalant, I wager," the inspector said unpleasantly. "Probably toluene." He uncapped a container and shoved it under the nose of one of the men. "Would you care to demonstrate how this substance is sniffed?"

The man quailed, jerking his head sharply to one side. "I

thought not," Ueki said. "Undoubtedly, you would prefer to leave it to young people who are ignorant of the risks."

I pushed back a coatsleeve and noted the time. "Toshihiko, maybe Goto-san and I should go on without you to get the cards while you handle this."

"A few minutes more, Sam, and we will go together. Okayama Station usually has patrolmen in the vicinity, and they can take care of the booking." He put a call out on the portable; then, after the officers arrived and assumed charge of the suspects, he checked with headquarters to see if he could be spared for an hour or so. The dispatcher replied in the affirmative and made a record of Ueki's destination.

"I feel guilty," I said, "about keeping you away from the duties the taxpayers finance, even for a short time."

"I would rather," he cracked, "that you feel guilty about the many hours that I work without pay."

As headquarters was near the *meishi* dealer's location, we decided to eliminate the parking problem by leaving the cruiser there and hoofing it the rest of the way. In the asphalt lot, I aired my two questions: what was toluene and why had Ueki asked that I give the dope salesmen the once-over?

Toluene, I learned, was both

flammable and poisonous. "No one armed with information," Ueki said, pocketing his car keys, "would inhale something used as a solvent and in making explosives. Nevertheless, it has been showing up for illicit sale in the larger cities recently."

Bad news, I agreed. "But why did you want me to sashay around those creeps with remarks about calling the cops?"

Ueki turned his back to the wind and lit a cigarette, laughing while he did it. "Sam, with your red hair and blue eyes, you possess a certain shock value. I relied on your countenance and the mention of police to fluster them sufficiently to drive them to the hiding place for their wares. Such people, as you might guess, seldom carry the goods on their persons because they want to minimize the threat of arrest. What does that frown signify, Sam?"

"I don't think it's right to use me like that, Toshihiko."

He looked up at the sky, then back at me.

"Would you feel less used if I promised to buy lunch for the remainder of the week?"

"Always glad to help the police," said I. Then I began to wonder if there was any way to cut down on the time it would require to select a "proper" style of business card.

There was still work left to do at the office.

Ueki and Goto, without speaking, began a process that usually leaves me stymied—finding the way in a sprawling Japanese city. They sauntered down lanes and twisting streets, traversing shop-lined mazes that, in essence, seemed much alike to me, pausing from time to time to locate some familiar landmark.

I was jealous of this ability, thinking of all the time I'd spent in taxis trying to get somewhere by telling the driver I was going near such-and-such a place, in such-and-such a district, trusting to what appears to be an ingrained Japanese sense of spatial orientation. Part of the problem for foreigners is that street names, as such, usually don't exist. People live or work in a certain subdivision of a certain district, in numerically ordered buildings in numbered subsections. For all that, I grinned, the postal service was sure and fast, and the ladies who collected the monthly utility bills got to me unerringly.

"Here," Goto said, stopping by a broad-fronted store. It looked like a small bank, with a polished stone facing and mirrorlike plate glass windows.

"Ah, Goto-san," I murmured, "this looks . . . well, *expensive*."

"*Hai, hai*," he said, apparently pleased with my powers

of observation. "My cousin's establishment is one of the best of its kind."

I stalled, figures running through my mind. "I only paid two or three thousand yen for the last cards I had."

"Yes," Ueki quipped, "and they looked like it."

My growing expectation of outrageous expense seemed to be confirmed when we entered: instead of the usual kerosene space heater, a central unit purred away, indifferent to the cost, and the magazines neatly arrayed on glass-topped stands beside a pair of upholstered sofas were of the banking and fashion variety.

Any last hopes for conserving cash outflow faded when a stocky, dish-faced man with thinning hair bowed his way toward us, eyes appraising my vinyl-topped loafers, then moving up the length of trousers and jacket altered from the rack, past a tie bought from a vendor pushing a cart of bargains on the street, to a face dabbed with an after-shave sold at supermarkets. His three-piece suit was tailored, the shoes were imported full-grain leather, and the tie's fabric came from creatures that feed on mulberry leaves.

"Mizuno Sobei," he said as he introduced himself in the Japanese manner, family name first.

"Brent Sam," I followed suit. Ueki Toshihiko was last, and then Mizuno and Goto batted a few kinship pleasantries back and forth. I noted that Goto was deferential and Mizuno smoothly polite, using the elegant diction that bespeaks good family, superior education, and success.

"We are here," Goto said eventually, "to see about *meishi* for Brent-san."

"Ah," said Mizuno, as though the mention of business was an extraordinary eventuality.

"We will want something befitting Brent-san's position as a leading contributor in Okaya's economic sector," Ueki said gravely, getting into the spirit of the negotiations as he removed his jacket. Mizuno took in the inspector's holstered revolver and the chattering radio without comment.

Forgetting my resolve to let the inspector and Goto do this their own way, I butted in. "All I need, really, is the average card, Mizuno-san. Something ordinary."

"Ordinary," he repeated, with something akin to shock twisting the corners of his mouth. "I do not deal in the *ordinary*, sir. My clientele are among the elite, and, Brent-san, I already know of your status in Japan from many articles in the press. Your modesty, sir, is laudable."

Ueki shot me a told-you-so

glance and resumed the helm. "Naturally, you have a book of selections. May I suggest that we begin our deliberations?"

Deliberations! I groused to myself. How could a nation with such a superb track record in industrial production, technology, and international competition accomplish anything with so much ritual, so much whoop-de-do about status?

Out came the massive sample book. They flipped through pages, furrowed brows, commented, shook heads, issued brief rumbles of near-approval, debated the advantages of horizontal versus vertical characters, argued as to whether my name or the company's should receive the most emphasis, debated the pros and cons of a plain off-white or a cockle finish.

And then, a chorus of closed-lip humming.

Paydirt! I exulted.

"Bank robbery!" the portable radio blared forth. "Inspector Ueki, verify your location!"

The sample book went to the floor with an undignified plop as the inspector shot to his feet and barked out the information.

"Green Clover Bank," the dispatcher's voice said dispassionately. "We have a report of a robbery in progress. All available units are on the way."

"Wait here for me," Ueki

said, dropping the radio on top of a magazine as he snatched up his jacket and bolted for the door.

Mizuno bent down to retrieve the examples of his work. "It would seem that Ueki-san's profession keeps him busy."

"Yeah." I was still a little dazed at the idea of a bank job in Japan. I decided it had to be a *yakuza* caper because only gangsters had access to the handguns that are forbidden to honest civilians. I wasn't very concerned, however. Ueki wouldn't be alone, and the Japanese police are a tough, effective lot. Time was the problem. Already three o'clock, according to my watch, with meetings to prepare for and paperwork at the office fairly screaming for attention.

"Listen," I sallied, "you people seem to have found something everyone agrees is best for me. Any reason we can't place the order now?"

Goto made a throat noise. "Bulentu-san, we have, it is true, reached consent on the major aspects, but, as Inspector Ueki is older and more experienced, I would prefer to have his final judgment."

"Quite so," Mizuno chimed in. "I do not think it would be right to proceed in his absence."

Discouraged, I listened to the communications over the radio for several moments before I

realized what had happened. "Hey, Toshihiko left his portable! Just where is the Green Clover Bank, Goto-san? He may need it."

"I will show you," Goto said. "It is within easy walking distance." We departed with a pledge to return as soon as we could.

When Goto and I reached the police cordon that afternoon, we couldn't see Inspector Ueki anywhere among the officers milling around, and we had no inkling of what—if anything—was going on inside.

Idea! I turned up the volume on Ueki's radio—and immediately regretted doing it: a hulk of a cop stomped his way toward us, and his totally blank expression could have been the mask of a very suspicious policeman checking out a foreigner possessed of an item of city property.

"Ah, good afternoon," I said. "You're probably asking yourself . . ."

"Inspector Ueki," the massive man rumbled, "told me that someone of your description would probably be found out here listening to one of our radios. I am to take you to him."

"My friend here?" I asked, indicating Goto.

The man-mountain looked down at him. "Inspector Ueki mentioned only you."



"I will be at the office working," Goto said, leaving with no sign of disappointment.

Radio in hand, I followed the uniformed officer to a group of men in plainclothes clustered at a rear exit of the bank. Ueki was there.

"How'd you know I'd be here?" I said.

He smiled. "I assumed that you would think I might need the radio."

"Do you?"

"In fact, I do not, but I appreciate your consideration." Ueki pulled a cigarette from a pack and twirled it between his fingers. "Sam, it looks like the police may be here for some time. We will have to postpone the card selection temporarily."

Resignation and disappointment strove for dominance. "What kind of situation have you got here?"

Ueki spelled it out. A man with a knife had gone into the bank, jumping over the low counter where deposits and withdrawals are made, and had seized one of the women tellers. Instead of scooping up the bundles of cash within his reach, he dragged his hostage with him to the central counting area, losing valuable time stuffing a shopping bag and warning off the managers who had refused to join the confused exodus of clerical workers. Ueki arrived before he was ready for his get-

away. The inspector ordered everyone else out and attempted to coax the man into surrender, but judged him to be unstable—possibly drunk—and backed away without drawing his weapon as soon as the bank was surrounded by other policemen.

"Is he demanding anything?" I asked. "Safe conduct, a car, and a promise not to pursue—something like that?"

The inspector got around to lighting his cigarette. "We have refrained from sending anyone in to talk to him yet, for fear of the woman's life. I am hoping that we can enter into discussions after he's had time to become aware that he's in no immediate danger. At the moment, however, he's desperate."

Desperation. That, I thought, said it all. Trying to rob a bank in Japan called for abandonment of caution: most were arranged like large, open business houses, with row after row of employees sitting at desks with calculators or computer terminals, all in plain sight of customers—or of those with other designs. Whoever entered a bank like this was subjected automatically to the scrutiny of many eyes. The irony, I mused, lay in the fact that even in a nation where handguns are restricted, criminals readily substituted other weapons. Gun or knife, it made no difference in

the long run, and certainly not to the woman being held in the bank.

"Why don't you give me a call, Toshihiko. It's past closing time, but I might as well get back to the office, see if I can't clear the desk a little." There was no way I could help, and I definitely didn't want to hang around to see a violent resolution, if it came to that.

Ueki escorted me past the police lines, and I took a stance by the curb to hail a taxi. Instead of a cab, however, it was Sobei Mizuno who stopped to offer me a ride. As the *meishi* dealer drove with extreme caution to the intersection where my office building was situated, I estimated that his was one of no more than half a dozen American-made cars in the whole prefecture—a huge hog of a gas-eater whose maintenance, I expected, would be defrayed in part by the bill I was going to get.

Goto was the only one on the premises when I finally walked into the office. We knocked off at eight, after a call from the inspector to the effect that everything was the same at the bank and that he was going off duty.

**T**he next day commenced on a hectic note. Yumiko, the outspoken octogenarian who tripled as

nanny, Noriko's assistant in home management, and general critic for me, came into our downstairs bedroom before sunrise and nudged me ungently with her foot.

"Get up! The *toyu* stoves need lighting after you fill them."

"Stoves?"

She nudged a little harder, and I reluctantly peeled away my half of the down-filled futon cover and sat up. I ordinarily tried to replenish the tanks of our two kerosene heaters each night before bed, but after getting home late and tired, I had overlooked the task.

"Hurry!" Yumiko demanded. "I must prepare breakfast, and the kitchen is freezing." She smiled at Noriko as my wife's eyes fluttered open.

Pulling my house kimono tight, I scuffled to the entrance-way in felt slippers, winced as I slid bare feet into the ice-cold pair for outdoors, opened the sliding glass door, and went around to the slab of concrete near the kitchen door where cans of kerosene were delivered by truck once a week. Taking the squeeze-bulb pump in one hand, I tried the kitchen door. Still locked. No use knocking, I sighed. Yumiko and Noriko were probably upstairs getting Kenji and Jotaro set for a new day. I hefted a container. Back to the front entrance. The kitchen heater's grilled front

seemed to be grinning at me wickedly as I tried to control my shivering so I could feed it white liquid without spilling it. I did a replay in the family room.

Done. I opened the kitchen door, put the can outside, returned to the now-full heater, and pressed down on the foot pedal starter. Nothing.

"What is wrong, Sam?" Noriko inquired politely as she bore the sleepy-eyed boys into the frigid kitchen and hoisted them into high chairs.

"Blasted batteries on the automatic starter are dead. We got any spares?"

"Batteries!" Yumiko snorted from behind my back. "Try one of these, if it is not too difficult." I turned around and accepted a book of matches.

I struck one and waited impatiently for the sputtering flames to settle down and turn the wire basket on top of the wick an even cherry red, made a couple of adjustments, and went to the family room where, out of Yumiko's sight, I bypassed the foot starter for another match. This done, I cracked the windows a few centimeters: no matter how cold the weather, we always made sure of an adequate supply of fresh air. Too many people in Japan died of invisible poisonous fumes each winter, especially those who lived in the

newer, airtight houses and apartments. With layers of warm clothing, our house would soon be comfortable by our standards.

Next step—shaving. As I started on my chin, Inspector Ueki bounded into the house. "Good news, Sam!"

"The guy who tried the bank heist gave himself up, right?"

"Hai," Ueki smiled, leaning against the small washing machine wedged between the lavatory and the wall of the tiled bath. "Early in the morning, before I was up, he released the teller unharmed and came out without a struggle."

"Great!" I washed away streaks of lather and splashed on mentholated lotion. "Now, if we can take care of those cards, it'll be a perfect day."

"Easy to do, easy to do," he assured me.

I wolfed down breakfast and went out to warm the car up while Ueki sat at the kitchen table chatting with Noriko and amusing his grandsons. The car wouldn't start, hacking weakly as I held the key in the start position and worked the gas pedal. It managed a final dry cough, then lapsed into ominous silence.

"I think it's the battery," Ueki diagnosed, "and I don't have jumper cables. Why not ride to work with me and have Noriko call a garage to replace it?"

First the heater batteries, now this! Well, if I could get my cards without further snags, the minor inconveniences weren't going to get me down. "Okay, I'll tell her now, then we'd better be on our way."

In a few minutes, Ueki was whirling past the park, waving to two cops operating a radar speed trap from a cruiser concealed behind the stone buttress of a gate. The cops came after us with screeching tires: the lights and siren left no doubt about the object of their pursuit.

Ueki pulled over and got out looking like a samurai about to wade into battle against hated foes. "Ignoramuses! You know who I am—I pass you several times a week on my way to headquarters!"

"Hai," one of the officers said with a reddening face as he cringed under the inspector's scowl. "But there is a message for you. Your personal car is not equipped with a police radio and the portable is ineffective inside the vehicle, so . . ."

"Enough," Ueki said, mollified. "What is the message?"

"There is a fire at the Kamada Sake Brewery," the second policeman said, "and headquarters is afraid it may be a case of *muri-shinju*."

"Drive ahead of me," Ueki commanded, "and clear a path!"

The inspector burned rubber

accelerating to breakneck speed behind them. "There is no time for me to take you to your office first," Ueki said needlessly. "Several lives may be at stake. Very recently, we arrested a man named Naoyuki Kamada on a charge of permitting pollutants to run into the sea, and this may be his rash escape from the ordeal of trial and punishment."

Any concerns about business cards and paperwork vanished in the chill meaning of *muri-shinju*—forced suicide. It could also be called murder and self-destruction.

Outside, beyond the car windows, was the world of the known, that which can be seen and heard and touched, a sphere of activity from which certain inferences could be drawn. Okayama was a modern city in a modern nation, a land whose people knew the secrets of the atom, had placed sophisticated instruments into orbit around the earth, and who, with almost totally imported raw materials, had turned their country into one giant factory while managing, somehow, to keep intact islands of serenity, quiet oases where contemplation, poetry, and the arts survived.

The faces of the people reflected a practical outlook on the problems that go with pro-

duction and budgets, inventories and distribution, car payments and mortgages, inflation and politics.

That, I meditated, was what could be seen. Beneath the surface, however, beyond the ken of the casual observer, was another world, one submerged in history, and one which, like *muri-shinju*, sometimes surfaced with shocking abruptness. As a man of the western world, I could understand the major reasons cited for forced suicide: long illness, crushing home loans, and gambling debts. But to ask—or force—one's spouse, one's children, to die together?

From what I'd read in the English-language press, the pattern was consistent, with minor variations: as a rule, the husband decided to die and the wife was taken along, with or without her consent. The rest of the family had no choice.

If a Japanese asked me why so many Americans feel it's their inherent right to own handguns, I'd have to fumble for an answer, possibly explaining that it was a privilege some of us thought had been handed down from our past, overriding current relationships to crime and accidental mayhem—a continuation of revolutionary and pioneering ways.

When I asked Toshihiko Ueki about *muri-shinju* that morn-

ing, he fumbled, too, frustrated because he could not pinpoint a single, satisfactory rationale. It was (he said) part of Japan's feudal past, when a man was expected to die with his master in the face of martial defeat or a fall from favor. And, he added, there was a paradoxical element, something of compassion: many parents felt it was shameful and pitiful to leave behind children unable to fend for themselves when suicide became (to them) necessary. Finally, as we turned onto a road that ran parallel to a tributary of the Asahi River near the Inland Sea, Ueki told me that a woman who abandons a child to an orphan's fate is more disapproved of than one who takes its life before ending her own.

"Sure as hell," I said with feeling, "not everyone goes along with that way of problem-solving."

Ueki smoked in silence for a time before replying. "Like most policemen, I consider *muri-shinju* a crime, but is it not true that suicide also is against the law in America?"

I saw his point. "Right, but how do you prosecute someone who's dead? Anyway, is a charge of pollution enough to spark a family suicide?"

Ueki slowed as we approached a two story cinder block building erupting flames and clouds of roiling black

smoke. "It is if the man believes that the disgrace is insurmountable—if he is convinced that he has done something to bring shame to those closest to him."

I braced myself for what we might have to see and walked with the inspector to a knot of firemen standing well back from the intense heat.

"It is too risky to send my men into that building now," the fire department captain said, "and there is no chance that anyone in there can still be alive."

"I agree," Inspector Ueki said. "Can you estimate how long it will be before someone can enter to recover the remains?"

The captain said he couldn't tell. Not wanting to dwell on what a search would reveal, I turned away. Some distance to the south, a paved road ended in a clearing on a pine-covered promontory overlooking the sea. Parked there was a car, facing the conflagration: standing by it were four people, two adults and two school-age children.

"Toshihiko," I said, "how'd Kamada get his family here?"

Ueki looked at me with a puzzled expression. "I would imagine that he brought them in his car."

"If that's so, where is it? All I see are the fire engines and some police units, except for

that set of green wheels over there." I pointed. "And whatever they're doing, it looks like a family affair."

We sprinted, reaching the car at the same time. "Naoyuki Kamada?" Ueki asked.

The stooped man with the close-cropped hair met our scrutiny with composure. "Yes, I am Naoyuki Kamada, and with me are my wife, son, and daughter."

"Ah, so," said Ueki in that Japanese expression which, by a linguistic accident, means exactly the same in English. "I am Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki, and this is my son-in-law, Sam Brent. We thought—that is, we feared . . ."

Kamada smiled. "The pollution released into the waters by my brewery was accidental, Inspector Ueki, but the responsibility is mine and mine alone. I decided, with the backing of my family, to destroy my brewery as a gesture of the extreme regret we have for whatever harm has been done."

Ueki then made what can be referred to only as a unique arrest, bowing several times and smiling. "I charge you with arson, Kamada-san, and, at the same time, extend my respect for your choice of a solution that leaves you and your family alive, well, and—I hope—willing to begin a new life after you answer to the courts."

Kamada was smiling, too. "Do you trust me, inspector, to return my wife and children to our home and then surrender myself on this new charge?"

Ueki's response was quick. "I'll tell my men to expect you."

"Too bad you had to bust him again," I said as we headed back to the fire to let the men know they wouldn't have to look for bodies. "He seems like a decent sort of fellow."

"Both decent *and* more reasonable than others might have been," Ueki said, "but he has broken the law. No matter what I think of him, it is my duty to hand him over to the prosecutor for determination of whatever fines or prison time may be required."

"Not easy being a cop, is it?"

Ueki's chuckle came from deep within. "It is easier, Sam, when the cop has a friend who takes notice of something vital that he has missed—such as Kamada's car. I was too worried about finding victims to look for the obvious."

I was glorying in the infrequent praise before I remembered that Goto didn't know my whereabouts and that I was one day closer to important meetings without benefit of business cards.

Kamada's torched brewery collapsed on itself as we began the drive to downtown Okayama.

Goto cornered me before I could get to my desk. "Noriko-san called, but I did not know where you were, so she had your car towed to a garage."

"Towed? All they had to do was pop in a new battery."

Goto shook his head. "It was not the battery, Bulentu-san. The mechanic thinks the car needs a new starter."

"How long will that take?"

"*Shirimasen.*" Don't know.

"Maybe one day, maybe two. Noriko-san said she called a garage with a good reputation, so it is probably busy."

Yeah. And costly. "Anything else?"

He took a manila folder from under an arm. "There are six new orders in here, two of them with requests for credit, and several queries about maintenance contracts." He glanced toward my office. "And, somewhere on your desk, you will find some papers from the Prefecture Tax Office."

"Oh, no! What do *they* want?"

"I believe they are asking for slightly more money than we calculated was owed." With that, Goto yanked off the sleeve garters, put on his jacket, and started for the door. "If you need my assistance, I will be back from lunch soon."

Then he was gone—without asking me to join him. Was I being punished for showing up



late? Couldn't the boss do that on rare occasions without being snubbed? I recalled Ueki's promise to pick up the luncheon tabs this week for services rendered in the arrest of the toluene pushers and dialed his number. I was still getting a busy signal minutes later, so I started reading the contract proposals, delaying the tax situation until last.

I was thoroughly engrossed when Inspector Ueki entered, chose a seat on one of the sofas, and started browsing through a newspaper. "If you've come for lunch," I said, wading through a letter in badly fractured English, "give me a couple of secs. Snowed under."

Ueki folded the paper to the sports section. "In the interest of concluding the selection of your cards, perhaps we should forego lunch and go directly to Mizuno-san's place."

"If we get the lead out, we can do both."

The inspector shot out his left arm, brought his wrist to eye level with an elegant movement, and went through his button-punching routine with his multi-function digital watch. "You are right. It is one o'clock, and I have an hour's break before I am due to return to headquarters."

One hour. That didn't seem adequate for both a meal and the card shop, but Ueki ap-

peared to be unconcerned. Happy thought! He was probably counting on getting the card order out of the way with only a few more brief formalities. Thus bolstered, I got into my jacket and a lined poplin trenchcoat.

Ueki's cruiser was parked in a metered space on the street, and the scant minutes still to go indicated he'd taken it right after it was vacated by a paying occupant. "Business first?" he asked.

"What else?" As we eased into traffic, I told him about my car. "It wasn't the battery. Mechanic says the starter's gone kaput."

"*Shimpai nai*," Ueki grinned. Not to worry. "I will be your chauffeur until repairs are effected."

The day was turning out okay, after all.

"Inspector Ueki and Mr. Brent. It is good to see you again." Sobei Mizuno seemed to be expecting us—the sample book was out on a table. He and Ueki took up where they left off—minus Goto—and I took in the decor again: still-lifes by a painter with a fixation on strawberries, a charcoal sketch with a Chinese motif, an antique scroll of calligraphy—and an ornate triangular wall clock with silver purfling on the wood points.

Then I did something stupid. "Hey, Toshihiko, that clock says it's quarter to two!"

Ueki showed disbelief, jabbed at his wristwatch, and sucked in his breath. "I believe the battery is in its terminal stage. Sam, I apologize profoundly, but I must leave to attend a staff conference. Mizuno-san," he went on before I could protest, "if it is convenient, could we meet later this afternoon, at five o'clock or thereabouts?"

"It will be my pleasure to await you," Mizuno said.

A review of the day's glitches paraded across my mental screen, subtitled with expletives: the dead heater battery, my car, the fire, the dun from the tax people, no lunch—and now this.

"Sam," the inspector said when we were on the sidewalk, "it will not be possible for me to drop you off at the office, but if you ride to headquarters with me you can catch a taxi from there. That will save you a kilometer or so."

Something cautioned me not to get into the police car, to hop a cab now and never mind the slightly higher fare. I ignored the self-advice and got in anyway. And as Ueki executed a hair-raising U-turn, the cruiser radio came to life. All units in the Willow District were alerted to a hit-and-run driver, one who had struck a pedestrian in a

crosswalk, and then sideswiped several vehicles in reckless flight through heavy traffic.

I ground the molars again. We were in the Willow District, and the inspector, oblivious to me, was assuming command of the operation.

**I**n spite of myself, I got caught up in the spirit of the moment—not in the chase itself, but in the reasons for it. From the crossfire of radio communications, it was evident that the police were after a drunk driver, one without regard for life or property. In Japan, getting behind the wheel under the influence is no slap-on-the-wrist, moving traffic violation, but cause for criminal prosecution involving loss of license, prison, reparations in case of fatalities or injuries, and stiff fines.

As we roared down the thoroughfare I called the Boulevard of Willows, I saw the man who had been hit. He was lying several meters outside the white-striped crossing at a light while a young woman knelt at his side, trying to give comfort. An ambulance was already there, and the attendants were unloading a wheeled stretcher.

Ueki decreased speed momentarily to pass the ambulance safely, then cut onto another street as bits of information continued to flow in.

The color, year, and make of the car being sought were known: it was running lights, jumping sidewalks, crumpling fenders, and creating mass confusion and near-accidents as it zig-zagged in and out of lanes.

"Unit Six-Two," a voice said. "We have the subject in sight, going in the direction of Ishima District."

"Also in sight," Unit Eight-One advised. There was a gap in the calls, and then the second unit came back. "Six-Two has struck a bus in the center of an intersection. Maintaining pursuit."

The inspector employed a short Anglo-Saxon word he'd learned in the States. "I want that man, Sam. Very badly." Ueki braked as we came up on the bus, which had been hit broadside. The front end of Unit Six-Two was folded in like an accordion.

The inspector surveyed the wreckage hastily, ordered the dispatcher to put a rush on ambulances, and angrily returned to the car-to-car channel as we rejoined the efforts to halt the man leaving the trail of pain and destruction. "Ueki to Eight-One. Do you still have visual contact with the subject?"

"Near Shokadai," the answer crackled through the speaker. "He appears to be trying for the road to Kurashiki, and we are now very close behind him."

I knew the area of winding prefecture roads. They were not meant for high speed, and at this time of day would be jammed with students, some afoot, many on motorbikes and bicycles.

"Shoot at his tires!" Ueki shouted into the mike. "There will be a slaughter if he gets into that college crowd!"

Eight-One acknowledged the order.

The subcompact was on its top. I scrambled down the sides of a ravine with Ueki. The driver, conscious and cursing, was trapped, wedged between the steering column and the seat, which had been jolted forward by the impact of the crash.

The stench of leaking gasoline was everywhere.

"Get back, Sam!" Ueki said. "The tank may explode!"

Instead, I kicked away at the glass on one front door while Ueki and the two officers from Eight-One pried at the other one with a tire iron. I heard the rip of cloth as my sleeve raked across jagged pieces of glass, but I managed to force the steering wheel back far enough to let Ueki get a firm grip on the driver once the door was open.

We dragged the driver up the incline to a safe distance and crouched breathlessly as the men from a fire truck sprayed

the overturned car with a blanket of chemical foam. The police who arrived after us stopped traffic and kept crowds of curious students away.

No fire. No explosion.

I looked at the man whose hands were being cuffed behind his back. He was uninjured but furious, pouring out a torrent of invective at his captors. "You made me have an accident! I could have been killed!"

Ueki put the palm of a hand under the man's chin and I could almost feel the tensing of muscles that might lead to a snapped neck. Then, with a rueful smile, Ueki snatched his hand away. The captive, no longer cursing, was shoved into the back of a cruiser.

"I admire your restraint," I said as we climbed into Ueki's car for the return to downtown Okayama.

"It was," he admitted, "an effort."

We got the tally of casualties much later: no deaths, but one pedestrian, two policemen, and six bus passengers who had to be hospitalized.

**F**our o'clock. I marched into my office with what I hoped was a no-questions expression. Goto was seated at my desk. "You smell like gasoline," he remarked, holding out a sheaf of papers.

"What are these?"

"Five contracts ready for your signature, one tentative rejection on the basis of insufficient grounds for credit extension, replies to the maintenance queries, and adjustment of our projected tax liabilities."

I was impressed with Goto's ability to step into management decision-making so easily—but didn't want him to know it. "How'd you manage all this, Goto-san?"

"The same way you do, Bulentu-san," he smiled. "With a ballpoint pen."

I carried the papers to a sofa to check them. Inspector Ueki walked in, saw the seating arrangements, and laughed. "Are congratulations for a promotion in order, Goto-san?"

"Te." No. "But a small raise would be welcomed."

I hurriedly tapped one of the contracts with a pencil. "These credit terms are very generous, Goto-san. How come?"

"Because," he said, "I know the reputation of the company. It is expanding rapidly, and we may be able to sell computer hardware to their new subsidiaries."

"Yeah, yeah." I riffled through more papers. "That may be, but why turn down the other credit request?"

Goto inspected his fingernails. "The president of that company is a notorious

spendthrift—a gambler and a womanizer. I do not think we should exclude the possibility of bankruptcy.”

“Sam,” Inspector Ueki broke in, “I can see that it is difficult for your company to carry on without your constant presence, but we do have an appointment with Sobei Mizuno, and I am now free to go.”

I briefly contemplated asking Goto if he could spare me again, but thought better of it. “If you run across any problems, we’ll be at Mizuno’s.”

“*Umake iku yo ni*,” he said, poker-faced. Good luck. “And do you want the name of a tailor to fix your jacket sleeve?”

I smiled tolerantly and once more embarked with Ueki on what I prayed would be the final journey to the card store.

There was a commotion on the other side of the street, visible from the window in Mizuno’s establishment. As he and Ueki plodded on with details, I opened the door and stepped out for a better look.

The site of the disturbance was a boutique. Two men dressed in double-breasted blue suits and dark homburgs stood at the bannered entrance like relics of the American 1920’s, braying something that, judging from the faces of the people passing by, was rude or offensive.

I was curious. With the exception of occasional organized protest demonstrations, angry public shouting in Japan is an infrequent occurrence. I moseyed over to check it out. At closer range, the two men were clearly toughs, out to even some score. “Kazuo Taoka,” one of them bellowed, “is an illiterate, welshing bumpkin!”

I wondered what this Taoka could have done to warrant such abuse.

Events progressed from words to the physical—a gloriously attired plaster mannequin came crashing through the window. From the resulting aperture I heard a man crying out in fear—or pain.

Sir Brent to the rescue! I dashed through the boutique door and saw another, bigger tough, cigarette dangling from his lips, bending a man’s arm sharply upward behind his back.

“*Tasukete!*” the hapless one screamed. Help!

I reached out for the tormentor—and four hands grabbed me from behind. The last thing I noticed before I was propelled into the street was a smartly dressed woman customer cowering in a corner, her hand over her mouth.

Brushing myself off from my new location in the gutter, I saw Ueki running my way. “Who?” he said.

“Them,” I answered, turning

in the direction of the hooligans who were smirking at my discomfort from their sidewalk vantage point.

Ueki's radio, booming out police calls, prompted an immediate ambulatory duet: one of my assailants fled to the right, the other to the left.

"There's a guy getting roughed up inside!" I said.

We dashed in. The cigarette dangler, startled, paused in his current activities—sitting astride the victim while banging his head against the floor.

Ueki didn't spend time identifying himself or making requests to cease and desist: he caught the bullyboy on the temple with a karate foot kick, swooped down, and slapped on the handcuffs.

"Well, well," the inspector said, "if it's not my old criminal acquaintance, Susumu Izuka. I am surprised that your last prison term didn't disabuse you of any notions about successfully carrying on with your 'private banking.'"

The inspector turned to the recipient of the thumping. "My assumption, sir, is that you injudiciously borrowed money from this ape, met delays in repayments, and then found yourself the target of disruptive antics and strong-arm tactics."

"*Hai*," the man said, eyes downcast.

"My men," said Ueki, "will be

here soon to record the facts, but now I must see to it that this prize specimen is caged."

The boutique operator recovered his battered mannequin while Ueki radioed for a squad car to transport the prisoner.

"What about the two who got away?" I said as we waited.

Ueki lit a cigarette and blew smoke in Izuka's face. "We keep an eye on scum like Izuka here, as well as their associates, and it is a matter of a few hours only before we round them up at their known hangouts." Another puff of smoke billowed under Izuka's nose. "I suppose you know, Sam, that you will be asked to identify the men who so ungraciously manhandled you."

"Dandy. What're the charges going to be—assault, disturbing the peace, or what?"

"That, and more," Ueki said as we watched the cruiser pull up. "Foremost, Izuka and his hired thugs will go before the prosecutor for violation of the Investment Law, which forbids exorbitant interest rates. The use of physical force, coupled with a second offense, will put Izuka away for many years to come, and we can hope the same is true for his friends."

I started laughing; Ueki asked why.

"I thought loan sharks were an American phenomenon."

The cop-to-civilian lecture inflections in Ueki's reply were pronounced. "No matter where they live, those whose credit is suspect for various reasons turn to unethical and underworld money sources in place of recognized and regulated institutions. They often pay a price beyond that which they bargained for."

"That figures. You think the boutique guy is, ah . . . stretched beyond his means?"

"The precise reasons for his involvement with these usurers will come out in the interrogation. They may be related to unsound business procedures, personal debts for gambling, or, as often happens, indebtedness run up in cabarets and night-clubs to impress friends."

The cop car took off with Izuka, and Sobei Mizuno came over to see what had been going on.

"It is most unfortunate," he said, "that we must contend with human trash like that."

But it wasn't garbage of any kind that was on my mind. I was wondering if I should risk being impolite and ask about the *meishi*. Mizuno removed the risk. "You will have your cards tomorrow, Mr. Brent. All was arranged some moments before Inspector Ueki happened to look out and note your plight." He smiled an apology. "I wanted to go with him, but I was re-

luctant to get in the way."

"Good news, and thanks for the thought!" Today was Thursday, and I could spend the weekend relaxing before the *meishi*-swapping during next week's series of meetings. "What time do you want me to pick them up, Mizuno-san?"

"Any time after noon. Shall I call your office to let you know?"

"Please," I said, "and thanks again."

He wished us a good evening and left to close up his shop.

Ueki stabbed at his watch buttons for a while, then grimaced as he remembered the condition of the battery. "What time do you have, Sam?"

"After six. Need to get back to headquarters before you knock off?"

"One moment." The radio came off the belt, a query went over the air, and the reply crackled from the speaker. No messages, no assignments. Back on the belt with the radio. "All clear, Sam. Now, if my memory is more accurate than my watch, our wives are at my home this evening for the weekly session of the Origami Club—with Yumiko and the boys in tow."

"That's right. Want to share some warmed-up leftovers with me?" I was on my own for meals that one night a week, when Noriko and Mrs. Ueki got together with friends who shared



their interest in the Japanese art of folding bits of paper into delightful figures of flowers, birds, and other aspects of nature that captured their fancy.

Ueki unfastened the band on his erratic watch and dropped it into a coat pocket. "I would like that, provided you do not object if I stop to get a few bottles of beer."

I didn't mind a bit.

**I**f I kept a diary, I might have dubbed this frantic period Days of Crime, Day of Friends, with the stress on the latter.

That next Friday morning, we stood in the garden after breakfast while the boys pranced about in the midst of plump wet snowflakes drifting down from a sky that was already showing broad patches of blue as brisk winds shooed the clouds away.

Inspector Ueki, who had arrived early enough to have coffee with us before taking me to work, said it was too pleasant a winter day to spend cooped up in an office, but I was eager to go. There were some special errands I wanted to run.

Once behind my desk, I called for Goto over the intercom, but instead of my head clerk, Miss Namba entered with her morning bow and pot of steaming green tea. "Goto-san," she said, "has asked me to tell you that he will be a few minutes late

due to some personal business."

"Oh, okay, Namba-san. If he gets back before me, tell him I'm out doing the same thing."

I accomplished my shopping in record time, and the blush of youth was still on the morning when Goto and I plunged into the company chores. At eleven on the dot, Inspector Ueki called to remind me of the two meals I had coming from the toluene affair, and asked if it would be all right to settle on a good dinner in lieu of some hurried lunches, as his schedule for the next few weeks was full.

"You bet! Goto-san, too—as usual? Probably cheer him up after being stuck in the office by himself most of yesterday."

"Be sure to ask Goto-san. Further, to make this a family treat, our wives will be coming, too, along with Yumiko and the boys. I will have a taxi provide transportation to the Flower Restaurant."

"You get a raise?" I said. "The mayor's finally wised up to your true worth as Okayama's top sleuth?"

"Not quite," he chuckled. "And, Sam?"

"Yep?"

"Don't bother with going after the cards. You will receive them when we meet tonight."

He rattled off a time and hung up before I could pump him for whys and wherefores, and I decided that the surprise

I had for Goto would be even better if delivered at dinner.

When Goto and I made our appearance at the restaurant, the hostess led us to a private seven-mat banquet room. I took in the other faces: Ueki, Noriko, Mrs. Ueki, Yumiko, the twins, and an unexpected participant—Sobei Mizuno.

Mizuno, as immaculately dressed and groomed as ever, quickly assumed the role of host, arising from his cushion to fill our glasses and lead us in a toast. The visage I had characterized as dish-faced softened into that of a man enjoying the company of old friends.

With a flourish, he handed me a red carton. I opened it, took out the top card, and understood that I had received a work of art. The cards were magnificent—my name embossed in gold lettering, the company logo in silver. Whatever the cost, it was worth it.

"It is my pleasure, Brent-san," Mizuno said as I passed the card around for general appreciation, "to present these *meishi* to you without charge, indeed with thanks, for I shall place them with my samples to demonstrate that among my customers are esteemed individuals of your character and accomplishments. As part of my gratitude, I asked Inspector Ueki,

whose dedication to duty is inspirational, to pass on my invitation for all of you to be here as my guests. In the future, I hope that we shall see each other often."

There was applause, a happy refilling of glasses, and more surprises. Goto gave the inspector the purchase he had made earlier in the day—spare batteries for the portable radio. "With all the trouble you and Bulentu-san seem to find," he said, "I would not want you stranded somewhere without being able to bring in help."

I stuck a hand in a jacket pocket and brought out the result of my own shopping expedition. "It's a watch, Toshihiko, but you might not recognize it. It doesn't have a calendar, it doesn't do arithmetic, and there are no electronic buzzers or chimes. What you do," and I demonstrated with exaggerated motions, "is wind this little stem once a day. It makes the hands go around, and they tell you the time. No batteries, very dependable."

Ueki regarded it with mock awe. "I will never cease to be amazed at technological advances. And, as you have been kind enough to think of me, I will now tender a small gift for you." He dropped my car keys in front of my plate. "Instead of lunch today, I went to the garage, ascertained that your au-

tomobile is in good operating condition, and drove it to your home."

I bowed, topped off Ueki's sake cup, and rapped on a glass with a chopstick. "Goto-san, in the spirit of the occasion, I also have something for you." I looked over at Mizuno and smiled. "You will be needing some new *meishi*, Goto-san."

"Cards?" he said, uncomprehending. "I already have cards, Bulentu-san."

"Maybe you do, but they aren't good any more. You see, Goto-san, as of today you're no longer chief clerk, and the title on your new cards will have to read 'Masahige Goto, Associate Director.'"

Goto did the only thing possible under the circumstances—he blushed a bright crimson, stammered, and said he was unworthy of the honor.

"No," I said, meaning it. "You've earned the promotion. It's my honor to have you to depend on."

Renewed applause and more toasting rang out merrily. Sitting with Yumiko on one side of me and Ueki on the other, I gazed around at all these people fondly, recalling what now

seemed a distant time in the past when I felt like a stranger in a bewildering land, lost and struggling to find my way. I wanted to speak my thoughts, to let them know my sentiments, but held back in the certainty that I would sound maudlin.

In that instant, I caught Yumiko watching me intently. In those still-clear eyes—and on a face that had witnessed the passing of so many decades—I saw reflected an acceptance that went beyond tolerance or familiarity, wisdom that transcended age and sex, race or nationality—any of the barriers that people manage to put up between themselves.

She placed a gnarled hand on my arm, whispering so that no one else could hear. "This old woman asks you to enjoy yourself tonight because, when you return to our home, you will find that Yumiko has filled the *toyu* stoves and mended your jacket—and it is not essential that you make a foolish speech."

Some gifts are better than others. I maintained afterward that it was the sake that led me to kiss her, but I don't think anyone believed it.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# THE TRAP

by Howard  
Bloomfield

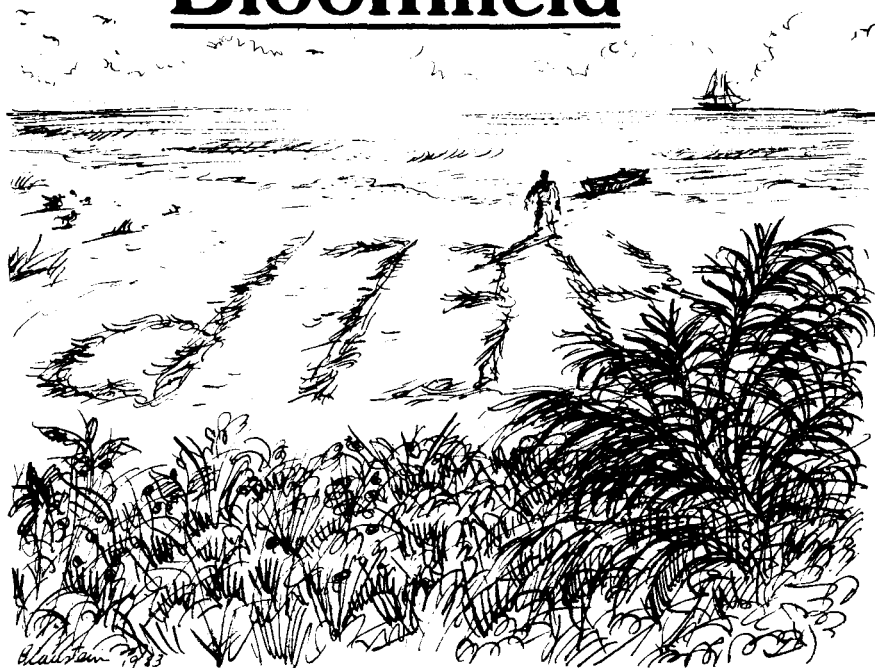


Illustration by Hank Blaustein

**T**he way that Armstrong Destin tried to put George Turner overboard was simple, and yet it held a trick, a touch of drama. The trick was misdirection: a focusing of the eye on one spot, and not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing.

The old Nassau sloop wallowed along with a broad arrow of foam at the bow and a gay bubble and froth sweeping out under the fat stern, because the trade wind could make any boat move, even though the boat waved foul grasses from its bottom like this sloop of Destin's. George Turner felt himself living in the middle of a color film and, at times, during the past two days, he had closed his eyes and opened them again, convincing himself of a vividness that was a blow on the eyeballs. The foam was so white, the sky so blue; and the dozens of sandy keys were golden chips on a sea of jade satin. And some of the keys wore dark green tufts of vegetation, though empty of human life—the Bahamas hold scores and hundreds of such tiny low islands, useless but pretty.

This was old stuff to Destin, but to George Turner it was adventure. Turner was a slight, wiry man, with brown face and brown hair, and brown eyes behind his glasses. His face gave an occasional pleased twitch, and his eyes blinked like an owl's. He kept thinking that pirate ships had sailed these waters, and it was easy to picture one here, prowling boldly, full of fighting men who were not at all like himself, men more like Destin.

The sun was beginning to set, and here it was a bigger red ball than elsewhere, and a red-and-gold cloud was a brighter and longer banner.

"Damned beautiful," said George Turner, jerking his fishing rod at the sunset. "And a good moon to come. We can go on sailing, huh?"

"Sure," said Destin. "Get us there sooner." Destin was taking him to a place where they could look down through clear water and see the ribs of an old wreck and the shape of a cannon.

Destin got up from the tiller, planted one foot across it to steer by, and stretched and yawned lazily. He was a bigger man than Turner, but the difference was more striking than that. He was a strong male animal, even if he seemed a sort of gentleman on the surface. Aside from the long knife scar down his forearm, it was plain to see that Destin had been in dangers and tight places and had fought his own fights and made his own laws.

As Destin put his right hand over his yawning mouth, a gleam in his ring caught his eye. The ring was a heavy band of gold, with

a green stone that was square and large. Destin held out his hand, turning it, letting the light strike into the stone.

"You ever notice this ring?" he asked George Turner. "It was found in an old wreck. I got the ring off a dead man, down in Port-au-Prince. I took it for a souvenir. Look at this engraving—I think it's Spanish."

While Turner stepped to him, Destin made his hand into a fist and remarked, "Not a bad brass knuckle, if a man ever needs one." He relaxed the fist and spread out his fingers. Turner gazed down at the worn, indistinct chasing either side of the stone.

"The man I took the ring from tried to kill me, when I wasn't expecting a thing," said Destin. "Do you notice, right next to the stone—"

Then George Turner was staggering, reeling, on the very edge of the stern, flailing his fishing rod for balance. The unexpected shove by Destin's left hand would have sent him overboard at once, except that he had tensed a little to hear Destin's story of killing the man; except that earlier that day a barracuda had staggered him by its savage strike, so that Turner had since kept himself braced when he held the rod.

In his wild gyration he saw that Destin's fist was cocked again, and behind it Destin's face was astonishingly savage. Turner smashed the heavy deep-sea reel on his rod against that face, for he had succeeded in swaying inward on the boat. Then Destin wrenched the rod down, but Turner, on his feet again, whipped a fish knife from the sheath at his belt. It opened a red streak on Destin's arm, and Destin turned and jumped down into the cabin.

Turner gasped, trying to realize what had happened. It had been only a few bewildering seconds since he was staring at Destin's ring, and now Destin was bleeding in the cabin. Turner stood in paralysis of fright, and then he thought of the revolver on a shelf below, and of Destin's hand snatching up the gun.

Turner raced forward in a panic to get off the boat, to dive and swim madly away. The sloop, its tiller free, was rounding into the wind, the sails shaking and banging. But it could come under control again in a minute, and follow and overtake him like a porpoise charging upon a fish. He slashed the main halyard. The big leg-of-mutton sail came down like a snowslide, a rotten topping lift broke, the boom was a thick club smiting the cabin roof. Destin was just coming up out of the hatchway when the boom struck his shoulder and knocked him below.

Turner slashed the jib halyard. The jib, on its slanting head stay,

came down in a gentler folding fall.

The mainsail lay all over the hatchway like a great canvas rug, and the rug heaved up over a crawling form. George Turner delayed his departure one instant more, to run back and snatch the fishing rod. He swung the heavy reel down on the moving bulge and the bulge backed into the cabin.

Then Turner in his fear went overboard. The water closed round him in a cool safe bath and swept some of his fright away. A strange crashing sound had entered his ears when he drove, because the cork helmet was still on his head, held by a strap under his chin. He had his glasses, too, hooked over his ears.

He swam furiously at first, and instinct told him to go upwind, because the sloop would be drifting away down the wind. When he looked back, the sloop was only a hundred yards away, a dark bulk. Though the night would not come for a while, the boat was dark because it lay against the red stain of sunset, in reddening water. Destin was not yet on deck.

Turner sprinted again. A slow ground swell heaved and fell, like a leisurely breathing of the sea. A man would be hidden in the hollow, and Turner tried to stay there, but he could not swim quite fast enough, and so he went under in a dead man's float when he felt himself being lifted, and began to swim again when he was lowered. Out of breath, he trod water for another look. Destin was on deck, walking and turning slowly, no doubt searching the water. Farther away than Turner had expected, until he thought again of the downwind drift of the boat. The red was turning leaden on the water, and dulling in the sky.

Turner remembered the dinghy lashed upside down on deck, and he wished he were in it. There had been time—it seemed now—to get it overboard. Turner was bitter that he had not thought there was time. He could not even remember if he had thought of the dinghy at all; and the bitterness engulfed him and made him feel heavy and tired in the water. It was too late now to think of all the things he should have done. But Destin would not be treading out here in a thickening gloom. If it had happened to Destin, Destin would still be on the sloop, and the only man alive.

Turner wondered if Destin would come after him in the dinghy. Unless he came soon and fast, he would risk losing the sloop in the night. Unless—Turner's brain kept making quick snaps at the situation, like the snaps of a cornered dog—unless Destin should hang up a lantern first, so he could find the sloop again. Destin couldn't come after him in the sloop without a job of rigging first,



because the severed halyards had whipped aloft and run out of the blocks. Thinking of that, the immediate fear of Destin went out of George Turner. He swam along slowly on his back, keeping his feet toward the dull maroon in the west. That color faded so rapidly, while stars came out in a slow sprinkle, that he picked a star to keep him straight on his course to nowhere.

The water was comfortably warm. Turner remembered reading once of a man who floated in the Gulf Stream for a week and was saved—true, he was unconscious and supported by a life preserver. But Turner thought he had at least a few hours ahead of him. The human body was ninety-eight percent—was it more?—water, and flotation was only a matter of ounces. He floated quite easily so long as he lay on his back as if in a loose straitjacket, but if he tried to turn the water gushed into his nose and mouth.

The pith helmet that was now under the back of his head seemed to help a bit, though it might slowly become a soggy thing. Already he imagined that a part of the brim flapped loosely against his neck as each push of his hands moved him onward a little more. He removed his waterproof wristwatch, his belt, and the sheath that had held the knife, but these were motions that sunk his face and left him out of breath.

He was dressed only in shirt and shorts and sandals. He thought of stuffing the helmet inside his shirt, but it gave him a weak comfort under his head, as if his head were really lying on something. And perhaps the sandals helped a bit, being of a composition cork sole. But a man could float, without helmet or sandals. A man had a few ounces of buoyancy in himself.

Turner tried to think reasonably about it. Life was a few ounces that would rather float; Death was a few ounces that would rather sink. He was in a big, warm swimming pool. He was lying on a kind of fluid couch, pushing himself along it by his hands, and covered all over but for his eyes and nose and mouth. But a swimming pool has sides and ends, and a ladder for climbing out, and a swimming pool holds no sharks and barracuda. He tried not to think about that, because it was a frantic thought. But it was very difficult not to wonder what might be moving below him, surveying him, as he inched along in this great black space with his eyes fixed on a star.

So Turner was immensely lonely. He imagined he heard friends wondering aloud what had become of him. He saw an office in Pittsburgh where soot fell on papers ready for him to sign, where familiar faces of men and women turned to one another and talked

about him, not knowing that a man named Destin had dissolved a partnership with abrupt violence. Turner was utterly shaken—he had liked to be with Destin, had secretly admired Destin's strength and his adventurous life. Now Turner was only two eyes and two nostrils in a black liquid world because he had put funds with Destin in a beef-cattle venture on a large island near Nassau—a plausible-looking experiment, a joint account with some cautious safeguards. Cautions against everything except one big thing that had never occurred to Turner: that he should suddenly be dead and it would all belong to Destin. The familiar faces wouldn't know about that, or that Destin had suggested this quiet side trip to see a wreck that might hold a treasure.

George Turner thought the night grew a little brighter, and trod water to stare eastward where the moon rose full. He searched the horizon for an island he thought might be there, and saw nothing but the silver path of the moon across the water. He then sobbed suddenly, and wanted to scream and claw at the water and go down, swallow water and fill his lungs and have the thing over—and told himself to go on pushing with his hands, and that all these islands were very low.

A new and startling sound came through the water that so quietly lapped and patted around his face. It was a slashing noise, like canvas being ripped, of something coming toward him very fast, and Turner went rigid, though trembling violently. In his rigidity his feet sank down until he was almost upright, and then, the slashing coming very close to him, he screamed and beat his arms and legs and tried to climb out of the water. He fought himself into exhaustion, and then saw the moonlight glisten on the shining black hides of a school of porpoise leaping and diving past him.

After that Turner was very tired. He rested on his back, his hands moving as if they belonged to someone else, his eyes on the star and his head toward the low moon, until he heard another sound ahead of him. This was a gurgling, rather rhythmical and musical sound. He trod water to look, and found his feet standing on sand.

Through a lapping froth he went ashore on the island, which was one of the three he had seen within several miles while he slashed the halcyons; and this was undoubtedly the one to the eastward.

The island was about three quarters of a mile long, and half as wide, and a broad rim of sandy beach ran all around it. Turner followed the beach, walking to get warm—the breeze chill on his

wet skin—until he came to his own footprints again. So low was the island that, under the bright moon, he could see across it from beach to beach. In the middle were tufts of wiry grass and one low clump of bushes. That might shade a man who crawled into it; that might make a hideaway, if a man could hide at the end of a track of footprints. Some sea birds went up with crazy screams as Turner walked among nests. Here was food, when a man began to starve. The thicket was thorny, and he went back to the beach. He lay on the warm sand and pulled it over him like a blanket.

Along the windward beach stretched a snake of sea grasses and kelp. Turner heaved up out of the sand and prowled carefully. A heavy timber of ship's deadwood, studded with rusted spikes, lay rooted in the beach. Here and there was some odd useless thing, dropped off a steamer long ago and perhaps hundreds of miles away. An electric light bulb. Three rum bottles. A little vial that had held someone's tonic, or vitamin pills. Turner snatched up four coconuts and shook each at his ear, hoping to hear a liquid thud inside. Each was light, empty, dry as an old skull, and he flung it down.

Something round and big crawled out of the sea, moved patiently up the beach, and began to settle into the sand. A sea turtle, feeling the pressure of eggs. A man could eat now and then, on this island. He could roof over some bushes with seaweed. Likely he could get a fire for cooking, with water in a curved shoulder of a bottle to make a burning glass. He might even unravel a fishing line out of his clothes. He could get himself some scraps of food. But there wasn't any water.

Turner broke a bottle on a spike and began to dig near the bushes. Below the sand was a crumbling coral rock that became harder, then too hard. He imagined dampness in the bottom of the hole. He decided it was only cooler than the surface sand.

Turner began to arrange seaweed into letters ten paces long on the beach. Sea draped its grasses in slow twists along the sand. The angular lines of H E L P would show better than S O S from the air. Someday someone in a plane would go over; perhaps a sportsman, making a wide swing, then circling and staring at a big word H E L P. Turner began another message for the man who came down to investigate, if the man came too late. In small letters he traced out "Armstrong Destin killed George Turner," and began to build up the letters with shells, into ridges. But now the moon was dropping low, and the night turned darker. He lay down to wait for daylight.

When the sun came up, Destin's sails were a fluttering white tent two miles away. The sloop was anchored off a sandy key. The little white dinghy moved to the beach. It was hard for Turner to follow the dinghy at that distance, and Destin he could hardly see at all—a small black mark on the sand. The dinghy moved off the beach. The sloop began to sail. Destin was looking over a few nearby islands before he sailed away, rowing in and glancing about for footprints. And now he sailed toward Turner's island.

Turner fell on the sand and beat it with his fists. He poured out hoarse curses at the boat. A man might try to hide. But it would be at the end of a plain trail. Turner stared at the sloop, the fat curve of sail, the white curl round the bow, with wincing eyes. He was a thin brown animal with a leg caught in a trap of sand, watching the hunter come. He sat down in the middle of the island and pushed up a sand wall around him, like a breastwork. It was a fort but with no defense. His pith helmet and his face were fixed still above it as he watched the sloop grow, the jib coming distinct from the mainsail, the figure of Destin standing up. The sloop held food and water. Turner remembered just where they were: the canned goods, the crate of fruit, the big galvanized tank beneath the deck. The cigarettes, the bottles of rum. They were all only a quarter of a mile away when Destin dropped the sails. The anchor made a brief white splash.

The dinghy trailed behind the sloop. Destin jumped down into it and began to row, turned his head, and pulled the oars harder. Destin knew. Turner watched the powerful back and arms move with the blades, and when the head did not turn again, Turner knew that Destin was very sure of himself. Destin would speak to him quite calmly. Destin might say, "Sorry, old man. You've only managed to string the thing out." He would be calm and steady with the pistol.

String the thing out. But if he strung it out, he would die of thirst. All that Destin really had to do was to sit on his boat and let him die. Turner saw that he must try to be calm and conserve his strength. He had an emptiness in his stomach that wasn't really hunger, and he hadn't yet so very much thirst. The day was brightening beautifully, the sea sparkling, the breeze cool, the sky very blue and the clouds very white above him and Destin.

Turner slipped out of the back of his sand pit, and on the far beach filled a bottle with sea water. The splash over his hands and wrists, the water round his ankles, made him more conscious of the dryness in his throat. He went in a crouch along the beach

until the clump of bushes was between him and the dinghy. Into the dry hole he had dug, he emptied the bottle. The water stood still for a moment, and then began to seep away. Turner filled the bottle again on the beach, and crawled back into his pit.

He sat up and looked over the top at Destin, who now was pulling the dinghy up on the sand.

"Destin!" he called.

Destin looked toward him briefly, without reply. He had seen the big word on the sand. He walked around it deliberately and cast a slow look round the sky. Evidently he came to the smaller message that Turner had started, for his feet made some measured kicks and sent up spurts of sand. Then with wide sweeps of his legs he went through the letters H E L P, driving the letters out of shape. Taking the revolver out of his trousers, he walked toward Turner. He called, "Good morning!"

Turner was not much exposed in his sand pit, only his head up, a glint of sunlight on his glasses, and his legs were tense under him. A hundred yards and no closer, he thought—about the length of a football field. He got up and began to walk away from Destin. He carried the bottle of sea water like a precious thing. Destin fired. Then they were both running.

Turner thought he could hold his own with Destin in running, though he was much less of a man in every other way. But he was lighter, and in Pittsburgh he had liked to play tennis. He saw some flicks in the sand ahead, and counted the shots until there were six. He looked back, and Destin was not so close as he had been. The distance had opened very definitely. Destin stopped, taking a box from his pocket, and reloaded.

Destin sat down. Turner was quite out of breath himself, and so he lay on the sand, pulling a heap up under his shoulders for a head rest, to relax as comfortably as he could. A hundred yards was a very long revolver shot. It called for luck, even if the target stood still.

There had been a box of cartridges beside the gun on the shelf, and a box held twenty-five. Two or three had been fired at a shark. Perhaps there was another box.

Destin had a white bandage on his arm. Turner could not be sure at the distance, but he thought there was a red streak across his face, the nose swollen, where the reel had struck. Destin's broad shoulders heaved slowly as he rested, watching Turner. Turner held the bottle at his mouth, and did not swallow. Even the motion made his throat drier. Destin stood up to glare at him with both

hands on hips, and then looked at the clump of bushes, as the only likely place for water.

When Destin walked away, Turner ran toward the dinghy. The attempt was hopeless, as Destin had kept himself closer to the boat. But it made Destin sprint for an instant, and fire another shot. Destin pushed the dinghy out and rowed along the beach, and Turner walked beside him, though across a wide reach of sand. Turner saw now that he might make it difficult for Destin to go far from his boat. At least he could give Destin a problem to solve.

Destin saw the problem, too, when he pulled in to the beach abreast of the low thicket. Turner watched him from a hundred yards away. Destin chased him up the beach, shot three times, and one of the bullets made a hiss. Then Destin walked toward the bushes. Turner ran back toward the dinghy. Destin ran back, too.

The thicket was at least two hundred yards from the beach. Destin took the oars from the boat, and started again. And Turner's heart leaped, hoping that Destin would rely on having the oars. He slipped toward the dinghy as Destin left it, thinking he could push it ahead of him by swimming, get into it and paddle with his hands. Destin came back on a run, but clumsily, because it was difficult to run with the oars, and fired a long shot.

Turner thought that Destin must be very angry. Destin sat near the boat a while. Then he shoved it off, and rowed toward his sloop.

Lifting the bottle again, Turner walked to the thicket. He stopped at the hole he had dug. He might have felt some elation at baffling Destin, but now he felt only an aching thirst. He had thought that Destin might examine the hole, feel some dampness, and wonder. But Destin could not approach the place. Turner poured the water over his face and chest, and noticed that Destin had stopped rowing. He shoved the bottle down into the dry hole, and then walked with it toward some sea-bird nests.

Eggs held moisture. A score of birds wheeled and screamed and dived at Turner, who carried a dozen eggs to his sand pit in his helmet.

He cracked two together, finding one liquid, and swallowed it, with fingers closed over his nose. But he retched; the egg came up. Then he remembered the mound, the scuffed place, the turtle had left. He dug with his hands. The leathery skin of eggs broke in his teeth with a relieving wet salve. He covered the place carefully and marked it with a shell. He stuffed wiry grass into his mouth, and it made a tough chewing gum.

Turner lay in the edge of the water. A man could not evaporate

so much water when he was immersed, and perhaps he would absorb a little. The constant lapping and bubbling was maddening.

After a time he went back to the wreckage of his word. The sand was very hot, and it was fortunate he had his sandals. The heat soared round him in shimmering bands. On the sloop Destin was undoubtedly eating, drinking and having a smoke, training his binoculars on Turner. When Turner had raked the seaweed all into ridges again, and the letters were sharp on the bare sand, and when he had walked around it in final perusal, Destin rowed ashore.

Turner watched over the rim of his sand pit while Destin struck a match. The seaweed was mostly dry, though some was still green. But there was plenty more of it, rolling in the edge of the water. The seaweed burned. But it sent up a thickening smudge, like a windrow of hay flaming and smoldering, trailing off the key like steamer smoke. Destin did not like that. He kicked the fire apart, flung sand on it, and kicked a path through the remaining letters.

"Are you here again?" called Turner. "Then let's play another set."

He seemed very calm, waiting for Destin. But the calm was a weakness, a dizziness of heat and thirst. He let Destin come almost too close, or the shot was lucky. It tossed sand up into Turner's face. It buried in the low sand wall just in front of his chest, and Turner jumped up and ran.

Two other shots passed him. When he glanced back, Destin was hammering after him, his face dark, running at a strong, ruthless gait, driving his legs with a will power that was ready to run his heart out. Turner couldn't leave him, though he had panic in his body. The distance closed a little. It was very hard to run in sand, sinking to the ankles, gulping air that was too hot to ease the lungs. He was almost ready to fling himself down when another shot sounded. He turned his head. Destin had stopped. Destin aimed at him, emptied the revolver, sat down to rock his head and body slowly, to open his mouth like a fish.

Turner was relieved that Destin sat for such a long while before he tried to approach again. Turner tilted the mockery of a bottle, stood up with an appearance of lightness, and walked away. Destin left the beach to Turner. Destin took the center of the ring, and the center was too small for them both. He kept Turner moving round the rim—Turner taking two and three steps to his one—trying to pin him in one spot against the sea. There was little running, except when Turner had to make quick spurts to hold his distance.



Turner's head and eyeballs ached, and at times his legs stumbled; but whenever there was an appearance of a chance, or whenever Destin wanted to rest, he moved doggedly toward the boat. Once Destin roared in rage, and at last he went to the shore and sat in the stern of the dinghy.

Turner lay in the water once more, rolling his burned face under, filling his mouth and blowing it out, and soaking some coolness into his skin. The water bottle was hot. He immersed it to cool. He could get through today. He had had luck against Destin, but tomorrow he could not escape. Tomorrow he would be too weak; he would collapse on the burning sand.

Destin slid the dinghy to sea. Turner sat up and felt the temperature of his bottle, and put it to his mouth.

"Turner!" shouted Destin. "See you tomorrow!"

Turner called back, "Sweet dreams!"

What was the ruse for tonight? he wondered. Would Destin come ashore, trying to catch him asleep? Would he risk leaving the dinghy on the moonlit beach while he searched? Turner considered whether he should himself try to swim out, whether he had the strength—a fly crawling to a spider. Destin would get himself a little drunk tonight, and scowl at the moon and the island. Only one thing was certain. Destin dared not leave.

The sun had not yet gone down. Turner looked around the empty sky, and began to restore his word on the beach.

At daybreak Destin rowed in to the seaweed printing. He kicked out the bellies of the letters once more, but with a difference in his motions this time, not swinging his arms with the violence of his kicks, but keeping a hand behind his back in concealment from the sand pit. Then he made his steps casually slow, as if a long day were ahead and there was no need for haste. The hand remained behind him in a careless way, while he walked toward the defenseless breastwork. Once he stopped to yawn.

Turner saw that the slow approach had taken Destin a little closer to the sand pit than usual.

Turner saw this, from a comfortable distance, when he emerged from the sand and raised himself through the seaweed in the end of one leg of the letter H.

Turner saw Destin kneel and aim at the helmet, with the glint of spectacles beneath it, and fire. Destin had lashed some kind of stock to the revolver, that nestled snugly like a rifle butt into his shoulder, and evidently greatly increased the accuracy of his aim. For the helmet, the glasses, rolled down out of sight. Turner sup-

posed that there was a hole right through the skull-dry coconut.

The dinghy was only a few steps away, and as Turner pushed it out he saw that Destin was running, in triumph at last, to the sand pit.

An uncontrollable shivering ran over Turner as he rowed. But he wasn't cold—each grain of sand and fleck of seaweed touched a nerve end in his burned skin. But this was from the hours of waiting.

The water in the sloop's tank was warm, yet it had a deliciousness, and ecstatic seep of life in his parched throat. Turner reminded himself not to drink too much at once. He went on deck to raise the jib, because that was the easy sail. The jib would move the boat sufficiently until he had eaten and drunk enough strength into himself to hoist the mainsail. The windlass was heavy enough work for now, and he did not trouble to bring the anchor all the way up. The sloop began to move.

Turner would conscientiously report Destin at the first chance, he decided, though it might be a few days, and the government could send out a plane to rescue him and let him explain. And if Destin grew too impatient with his thirst, then—Turner's trembling ceased of a sudden—Destin had a gun.

Turner drank another glass of water, sipping each wonderful drop, and sucked the juices out of a sapodilla plum, and presently looked at the island through the binoculars. He regretted his glasses, but the binoculars focused clearly.

The plane would be able to find Destin, because Destin had an armful of seaweed and was restoring the big word H E L P on the beach.

# THE STORY THAT WON



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The October Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by K. J. Franks of Wooster, Ohio. Honorable mentions go to Jeri A. Sheaffer of Canton, Ohio; Bennett Perryman of Shawnee, Oklahoma; David L. Tierney of Pittsburg, Kansas; Mark Phelan of Boonton, New Jersey; Steve Hartshorn of Gahanna, Ohio; Diana Kaye of Bloomington, Illinois; Alison Spitz of Oxford, Massachusetts; Sandra Romero of Pittsburg, California; Hendrica Kovacs of Toronto, Canada; Danell Wolf of Hill City, Idaho; A. A. DeSena of Old Bridge, New Jersey; N. Lee Barker of San Francisco, California; and Thomas C. Cecil of Dayton, Ohio.

## THE STALK by K. J. Franks

"All right, break it up, folks," Detective Grimm said gruffly to the knot of bystanders rubbernecking the corpse. "We got police business here. What's up, Phil?"

"Looks like murder. Guy was pushed from a high place," the sergeant replied, gesturing toward the victim sprawled across the ground.

"Big fellow," Grimm grunted.

"I'll say. Fifty-two feet tall. Weighs about seven tons. I sent Murphy back for a couple more gallons of chalk powder so we can finish outlining the body."

"Any leads?"

"Yeah," the sergeant said. "Some neighbors say they saw a man named Jack hanging around here. He's a local character, I gather. You know the type: ne'er-do-well bum, can't hold a job, a loser always looking for a quick score. Well, somebody saw him climbing around on that this morning," the sergeant said, jerking his thumb toward the huge tree-like plant soaring up into the clouds behind him. "The lab boys scraped a sample off. They say it looks like some kind of mutant bean species. Sprang up overnight. Beats me."

Grimm looked thoughtful a moment. "Say, this Jack . . . You don't suppose he's the Jack of the Hill Caper, do you? You remember—that girl, Jill, was shoved down a hill . . ."

"Same M.O.," the sergeant mused.

"Yeah, but we could never pin it on that punk boyfriend of hers . . . Jack Horner! That's the name! Real wise guy. Kept saying what a good boy he was. Well, let's just pick that hood up and see what's what . . ."

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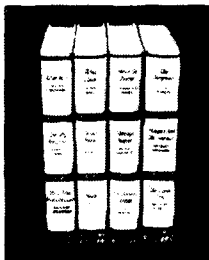
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# Next time you see a tree, say thanks.

Thanks  
for books and pencils  
and paper, thanks for wood to  
build our homes and firewood  
to keep us cozy in them, thanks  
for violins and cellos and  
guitars, thanks for furniture  
and paints and paintbrushes,  
thanks for maple syrup and  
honey, thanks for park benches  
and gymnasium floors, thanks  
for fruits and jams and jellies,  
thanks for shade for a Sunday  
afternoon nap, and a special

thanks for the oxygen we  
breathe. Trees give us a lot.  
Don't take them for granted.  
Please be careful with fire  
in the forest. A tree will  
thank you.

**Only you  
can prevent  
forest fires.**



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**FOREST FIRE PREVENTION CAMPAIGN**

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CM-4-82

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# BOOKS IN YOUR MAILBOX

STIMENON  
MAIGRET HAS DOUBTS

Bejeweled Death  
MARIAH BARSTON

The Copenhagen Connection  
JAMES A. LEE

THE FARAWAY DRUMS  
MICHAEL O. MORROW

Next of Kin  
SARA WOODS  
ENTER A GENTLE WOMAN

Possessed With Intent to Kill  
AARON MARC STEIN

Michael Underwood  
HAND OF FATE

ANNE MORICE  
OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT

Twice Shy